

# STANDING ALONE, BUT NEVER LONELY

AN INDUCTIVE STUDY OF  
RUTH AND ESTHER

DR. O. WILLIAM COOPER

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# **STANDING ALONE, BUT NEVER LONELY**

## **AN INDUCTIVE STUDY OF RUTH AND ESTHER**

**O. William Cooper**

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Fort Collins, Colorado 80526

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## DEDICATION

Recently, it has been my privilege to meet and serve Christian brothers and sisters in the Ukraine. Through repeated imprisonments, physical and social abuse, privation of family and many other kinds of persecution, they have demonstrated their love for God in Jesus Christ, their eagerness to witness to the lost.

Like the Apostle Paul, the threat of prison or other persecution could not dampen their zeal to spread the Gospel. Having served lengthy prison terms for witnessing, they emerged from prison eager to tell people about the saving grace of Jesus Christ. They knew full well they would be separated from their families again and returned to prison.

Not one of them ever volunteered to tell me of their suffering. They all shrugged it off saying, "That is not special. We only did what a follower of Jesus must do."

I have seen the quiet strength of their presence; their humble determination to be disciples of Jesus who take up their cross daily. I have marveled at the strength God has given them. I stood in awe of the depth of their determination to joyfully accept the destruction of their goods.

I met a pastor who was told that if he did not relinquish his position as a pastor and stop preaching, they would take his nine sons and these young men would not grow as Christians. He looked at them and calmly said, "I cannot keep you from taking my sons, but I cannot give up my faith in Jesus Christ and my calling to preach the Gospel." While the pastor took his stand for Christ in the court, his congregation stood outside singing hymns as loudly as they could to witness to the court and be an encouragement to the pastor. The lay leader of that congregation was sent to prison 28 times. I preached in one church where the entire basement was dug by hand, after midnight because it was illegal to build or repair a church building. I taught in one congregation where the entire choir went to prison because they went to another church to sing. I taught students who had been deprived of public education because their father was a pastor. By the way, they were excellent students.

The evidence of their love for Christ was amazing, since I have never suffered, in any way, because Jesus is my Lord. I never faced prison because I could not refrain from telling people about Jesus. I never paid a fine each week for 45 years because I allowed Christians to meet in my home. I can only hope that when my time comes, I will be able to follow Jesus as they have.

With great thanks and praise to God for the transformation He has made in their lives and the strength he has given these, His saints, I humbly dedicate this study to my faithful brothers and sisters in Christ.

Gratefully,

*O. William Cooper*

O. William Cooper

Shepherd's Rest  
Loveland, Colorado  
June 5, 1995





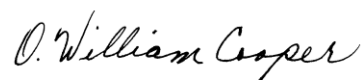
## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

No author is an island. A writer must depend upon the assistance of countless people to bring the work to completion. My wife, Ruth, painstakingly pursued the proofreading of the manuscript. Her enthusiasm and encouragement have been a great source of help and blessing to me. The task of proofreading has also been pursued by Mrs. Betty Christensen, Mrs. Eve Lectenwalter and Rev. Mary Neil.

Dr. Peter Stone has again used his great skills with the computer to keep my fumbling efforts from being reduced to total chaos.

The material in this volume was first used in a study with about 75 adults from Faith Evangelical Free Church, Fort Collins, Colorado. Their enthusiastic responses encouraged me and underscored areas of the study which would benefit from deeper explanation and clarification.

To each individual who has so graciously assisted in this effort, I offer my sincere thanks. I pray that God will richly bless each one as they serve Him, helping to make this study a reality.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "O. William Cooper".

O. William Cooper

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Loveland, Colorado  
June 5, 1995



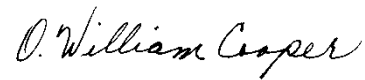
## THE PREFACE

This is an Inductive study of the book of Ruth and Esther. As you will observe, this study is designed to be used in two different ways:

- After the initial chapter, each chapter is preceded by a series of questions concerning that chapter in the book of Ruth or Esther. It is hoped that these questions would serve as a guide for the reader to study the text for him/herself. Having done this, the reader would compare his/her findings with the study which makes up the body of the book.
- If a reader is not prepared to do the suggested study, he/she can simply read the study, in each chapter, which immediately follows the questions. We want this to enhance one's understanding of the book.

Whichever process meets your needs best, it is our fervent hope that this study will add perceptibly to your awareness of this portion of God's word.

It has been our experience that people tend to overlook these beautiful portions of God's word. We are not sure why that is true. It may be because the books are quite brief. Other short books in the Old and New Testaments receive the same kind of treatment. It may also be because they do not include what some might call "major players" in the ongoing story of the word of God. For whatever reason, these are books that many people omit as they read through the Bible. We want to enable the reader to discover the depth of these books as they have never experienced them before.



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## THE GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Some might wonder why we set out on a study of these two books. These are the only two books in the Bible, Old Testament and New Testament, which bear a woman's name. They are two of the three books in the Bible, Ruth, Esther and Song of Solomon, where a woman appears to be the central focus of the writing.

There are several good reasons why we should study these brief accounts of spiritual history included in the Bible:

1. As we talk with Christians, it appears that these two books are often bypassed or overlooked as unimportant. Our contention is that that is unfortunate and needs to be corrected. These books are as worthy of our attention as any Biblical book.
2. We believe that the author, whoever he may have been, was inspired by God to record these books for the benefit of God's people in every succeeding age.
3. We believe God can use the experiences of these women to uncover something of His greatness just as clearly as He did in the stories of Moses, Joseph, Samuel and David.

In a time and part of the world where women were mistreated and overlooked, here are two outstanding women who were examples in their own times. Ruth and Esther were women who at crucial times in Israel's history took a stand for God and for righteousness that made a measurable difference in the lives of their people. It appeared that they took their stand knowing full well the price they might be called upon to pay. Still they willingly paid the price.

People, in that day, thought that a woman's place was in her tent, caring for her family. Be that as it may, for these two giants of faith, it was far more. Both of them were prepared to pay the ultimate price to serve God and minister to His people.

There are contrasts between the two as well. Ruth was a Moabite native who chose to leave her idols to serve God and become a Jew. Esther, on the other hand, came from a strong Jewish family only to become the queen of Medo-Persia.

It is the ministry of the Holy Spirit to inspire the men who penned these revelations of God and His will as well as enabling those of us who come centuries later to comprehend what God has said about Himself and His will for our lives in these sacred writings.

Inductive Bible study is, in my judgment, a marvelous study tool. It is important to state, however, that unless the Holy Spirit guides our study, we can spend weeks and months in a book and totally miss what God placed there for our discovery. To this end, we urge you to bathe your Biblical search in prayer as well as careful study. May God richly bless your penetrating search of this portion of His holy Word.

It is our prayer that within the pages of the stories of these great women you may discover something of the greatness of the God of Israel.



# **THE INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF RUTH**

## **A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF RUTH**

This is an inductive study of the book of Ruth. Inductive Study is a process designed to enable the reader to do a personal study of the book. It is an attempt to enable the student to do his/her own study. In this study, one seeks to identify the message which the Biblical author sought to convey. Having done this, the student seeks to discover what the author said about the primary teaching of the book.

We will attempt to accomplish this through an appeal to the rules of good writing, an understanding of the meaning of the Hebrew words and through an understanding of Jewish and Near Eastern cultural elements employed or described in the book.

### **THE AUTHOR**

The Babylonian Talmud, a collection of writings of Jewish civil and religious law, is made up of two parts - the text and the commentary. It suggests that Samuel wrote the book of Samuel, the book of Judges and Ruth. There is no internal evidence to say who wrote the book of Ruth. There are several suggestions, but we honestly do not know the identity of the author.

### **THE DATE OF WRITING**

It appears the book was written after the time of David, because he is mentioned in it. Beyond that we have no conclusive way to tell when the book of Ruth was written. More liberal scholars suggest a time in the 700 to 600 BC period. More conservative scholars, on the other hand, would place the writing during the time of David. Solomon, however, is not mentioned. This would tend to place the writing somewhere between 1,000 and 900 BC

### **THE DATES OF THE EVENTS IN THE BOOK**

The time setting of the book is given in 1:1 - during the time of the Judges - 1405 BC - 1043 BC. It appears this book deals with events which occurred very late in this period.

### **THE CONTENT OF THE BOOK**

The book of Ruth is not a history book, but it deals with historical places, events and times. I like to think of Biblical historical books as spiritual history. By this I mean the author has used an historical situation and material to reveal something of the person and nature of God. As we study the book, we will regularly ask ourselves, what is this author saying to us about the person and nature of God?

One last concern. We are told that the book of Ruth was given its name because she was a prominent person in the story being told. It is true, Ruth is a prominent person in this book. I would like for you to be on the alert during this study for information that has a bearing on the name of the book.

I will start our study by saying that there are some reasons to question whether this is the most appropriate name for the book. In our closing remarks, we will consider both the reasons it is and is not an appropriate title for the book.

## STANDING ALONE, BUT NEVER LONELY

This story deals with the life of the family of Elimelech. The family members are as follows:

- **Elimelech** - father, husband of the family
- **Naomi** - Wife and mother
- **Mahlon** - oldest son and husband of Ruth
- **Chilion** - Younger son of Elimelech and Naomi and husband of Chilion
- **Ruth** - Moabitess and wife of Mahlon
- **Orpah** - Moabitess and wife of Chilion

This story deals extensively with the Levirate law - The word comes from the Latin and means husband's brother. This law is first mentioned in Genesis 38:8. Onan was called upon to marry the wife of his brother Er. This law is still practiced throughout the East - Arabia, even among the Caucasus tribes.

The firstborn son of such a marriage was considered the son of the dead brother. He will keep the name of the deceased brother from becoming extinct. To allow the deceased brother's name to become extinct was considered the ultimate shame.

This law also made it possible to keep the property inside the family. This was absolutely important to them.

If, however, the oldest brother refuses to fulfill the responsibility, the widow can publicly humiliate him and people would take her side and make him wish he had observed the law. When a woman spit in the brother's face it was his relinquishing of his portion of his brother's estate. The Levirate law was considered a duty of love for the brother and the family.







## AN OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK OF RUTH

An overview of a Biblical book gives one an impression concerning where the thrust of the book is going. I have attempted to do an overview of the book by giving each chapter a title and placing these together to do observations about them.

<b>1:1-22</b>	<b>NAOMI RETURNS FROM MOAB TO BETHLEHEM</b>
<b>2:1-23</b>	<b>RUTH GLEANED THE FIELDS OF BOAZ</b>
<b>3:1-18</b>	<b>NAOMI SEEKS A HUSBAND FOR RUTH</b>
<b>4:1-22</b>	<b>BOAZ MARRIES RUTH</b>

I must admit that the overview does not immediately seem to be too helpful. We will consult it as we continue with the study. I have found it to be helpful as I reflect upon what I have already studied. I trust that it will be the same for you.

When dealing with Biblical books, which are historical in nature, it is sometimes helpful to compare the conditions under which they begin with those at its conclusion:

<b>Ruth 1:1 - 5</b>	<b>Ruth 4:18 - 22</b>
There was a famine in Canaan Elimelech took his family to Moab His two sons married Moabite women Elimelech, Mahlon and Chilion died Naomi was left alone with Ruth and Orpah	The genealogy of David through the lineage of Boaz

Admittedly, it is hard to resolve the dilemma created when you compare 1:1-5 with 4:18-22. Some scholars say the final paragraph is clearly a later addition to the text and should be removed. I doubt that position. As we go through this study, we will try to keep this question in mind and refer to it from time to time. We will attempt to show, if possible, how these two paragraphs relate to each other. More attention will be given to this issue in the closing chapter.



# QUESTIONS FOR RUTH LESSON 1

## RUTH 1:1 – 22

### NAOMI RETURNED FROM MOAB TO BETHLEHEM

1. In our best manuscripts, there are four paragraphs in Ruth chapter one. On the chart below, write a title of seven words or less for each paragraph.

1:1 – 5	
1:6 – 14	
1:15 – 18	
1:19 – 22	

2. What evidence can you find in the text to indicate the time in which this story took place?
3. Read Judges 21:16-25 and then Ruth 1:1-5. What observations can you make on the basis of this reading?
4. In Ruth 1:1-5, the author sets the stage for the entire story.
- Ruth 1:1, 2, form the background for the entire book. Make a list of the pieces of information the author provides in these verses.
  - In a Bible Dictionary or Bible helps section, look up the word "Ephrathite" and "Ephraimite." What is the difference between the two?
  - In 1:3, the author tells us that Elimelech died. How well would this family be able to sustain itself without Elimelech at the head of it?
  - In 1:4, 5, the author gives us several pieces of information:
    - Why does the author identify the fact that Mahlon and Chilion had married Moabite women?
    - What does it add to our understanding when the text says that they lived in Moab about ten years when Mahlon and Chilion died?
    - In 1:5, the author indicated that Mahlon and Chilion died, and then indicated that Naomi "was left without her two sons and her husband." What is the significance of this awkward repetition?
5. In Ruth 1:6-14, the author describes Naomi's return from Moab to Bethlehem.
- In 1:6, the author indicated that Naomi heard that "the LORD had come to the aid of his people."
    - What does the author tell us in this quote?
    - There was food available in Moab. Why would Naomi decide to return to Bethlehem at this time?
  - In 1:7, 8, the text clearly states that the women started on the trip before Naomi suggested that Ruth and Orpah go back to their families.
    - Why would Naomi not suggest this before they started the journey?
    - Naomi urged Orpah and Ruth to return to their "**mother's tent**." Why would she do that?

## STANDING ALONE, BUT NEVER LONELY

- (3). In 1:8-10, there are hints about the relationship between Naomi and her daughters-in-law.
  - (a). What are the hints?
  - (b). What do these hints tell you?
- c. In 1:11, Naomi again urges Orpah and Ruth to return to their original families.
  - (1). What questions does she ask the two women?
  - (2). What did she say to Orpah and Ruth through these questions?
- d. In 1:12, 13, Naomi a third time urges Orpah and Ruth to go home.
  - (1). What reasons does Naomi give?
  - (2). Why was it harder for Naomi than it was for Orpah and Ruth?
  - (3). In 1:13, Naomi said, "It is more bitter for me than for you."
    - (a). Describe the emotional tone Naomi employed in this statement.
    - (b). How does Naomi explain this statement?
- e. In 1:14, Orpah and Ruth responded to Naomi's third attempt to urge them to return.
  - (1). How did Orpah respond?
  - (2). What does this response mean?
  - (3). How did Ruth respond?
  - (4). What does this response mean?
6. In 1:15-18, the author described Ruth's response to Naomi's entreaty to go home, as Orpah had done.
  - a. In 1:15, Naomi made her final plea for Ruth to return home.
    - (1). Put yourself in Naomi's position as she urged Ruth, for the third time, to return to her family.
    - (2). How would you feel as you urged Ruth to leave?
    - (3). How did Naomi describe Orpah's actions?
    - (4). What did these actions mean?
  - b. In 1:16, 17, Ruth responded to Naomi's more urgent appeal.
    - (1). Put yourself in Ruth's position as she responded to Naomi's fourth plea.
      - (a). What would your emotions be?
      - (b). What hint is there of the relationship between Ruth and Naomi?
    - (2). Ruth made six affirmations in her response to Naomi's plea.
      - (a). What are these affirmations?
      - (b). What does Ruth mean by these affirmations?
    - (3). Ruth concluded her six affirmations with an oath.
      - (a). What was the oath?
      - (b). What does the oath mean?
      - (c). Why was the oath necessary?
  - c. In 1:18, the author described Naomi's response to Ruth's affirmations and oath.
    - (1). What was Naomi's response?
    - (2). What was the basis of Naomi's response?
    - (3). What action did Naomi take?
7. The author described the arrival of Ruth and Naomi in Bethlehem in 1:19 -22
  - a. Read 1:19 several times. Think of yourself as one of the women who met Naomi and Ruth when they arrived at Bethlehem.

## QUESTIONS FOR RUTH LESSON 1

- (1). What would you **feel** when you saw Naomi?
- (2). What would you **feel** when you saw Ruth?
- (3). What would you **think** when you said, "Can this be Naomi?"
- b. In 1:20, Naomi responded to her family and former neighbors greeting.
  - (1). How did Naomi **feel**?
  - (2). Put Naomi's reply into your own words. Try to include an understanding of her emotions as she responded.
  - (3). Explain what she meant when she said, "The Almighty has made my life very bitter."
- c. In 1:21, Naomi gives further explanation of her feelings about her condition. She said, "I went away full, but the LORD brought me back empty."
  - (1). To whom does she ascribe responsibility for the abundance with which she left Bethlehem?
  - (2). To whom does Naomi ascribe responsibility for the impoverished condition in which she returned to Bethlehem?
  - (3). How do you understand Naomi's view of her life?
  - (4). Why does Naomi repeat her questions, "Why call me Naomi?"
  - (5). What does "The Almighty has brought misfortune upon me" add to Naomi's previous statement, "The LORD has afflicted me"?
- d. In 1:22, there is a summary statement about the arrival of Naomi and Ruth in Bethlehem. Read this verse very carefully.
  - (1). Compare the picture of the arrival of Naomi and Ruth in Bethlehem, as reported in 1:22, with the report in 1:19. What observations can you make?
  - (2). Notice the way the author speaks of Ruth - "...Accompanied by Ruth, the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law." What purpose is served by these additional identifications?
  - (3). The author indicated that Naomi and Ruth arrived in Bethlehem "as the barley harvest was beginning." What information does this provide for us?
8. Review chapter one and record everything that it tells you about God.
9. Review the chapter again.
  - a. What does it tell you about Ruth?
  - b. What does it tell you about Naomi?
10. What does this say about the way you want to live your life from this point forward?





## LESSON 1: – RUTH 1:1 – 22

### NAOMI RETURNED FROM MOAB TO BETHLEHEM

There are four paragraphs in Ruth, chapter one.

1:1 – 5	Naomi's Husband and Sons Died in Moab
1:6 – 14	Naomi Returned to Bethlehem, Orpah Remained
1:15 – 18	Ruth Declared Allegiance to Naomi and God
1:19 – 22	Naomi and Ruth Arrived in Bethlehem

#### Ruth 1:1-5 - Naomi's Husband and Sons Died in Moab

The first verse of the book of Ruth gives us a clue concerning the time in which this story occurred - the time of the Judges. This is a period of at least 350 years between the death of Joshua, in approximately 1405 BC, and the reign of Saul in 1043 BC. The chapter begins with the word "and." This may mean that this chapter is a continuation of something previously written, possibly the book of Judges. It is possible that this happened, but we cannot say with certainty. If you read the end of Judges and then the beginning of Ruth, it appears possible. We should be aware of the fact, however, that the book of Ruth does not follow Judges in the Hebrew Bible.

Some scholars believe that the book describes events that took place 304 years after the death of Joshua. These were traumatic times. The people experienced great devastation from famine as well as the destruction of one war after another.

The author set the stage for the story in these words:

*The man's name was Elimelech; his wife's name Naomi. The names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there. Ruth 1:2*

The author said that Elimelech was an Ephrathite. "Ephratha" was an ancient name for Bethlehem. This was true in the time of Jacob and was still true in the time of Ruth. However, in the time of the kings (I Kings 11:26) the name had changed to Ephraimites.

There are some things we know about each person in the family:

- **Elimelech** means "God is king." He was a leader in Israel.
- **Mahlon** means "sickly." He was the elder son of Elimelech and the husband of Ruth. He died childless, but he had the benefit of the Levirate law. We will describe this law later in our study.
- **Chilion** means "pining." He was the younger son of Elimelech and the husband of Orpah. It is quite possible that he died before Mahlon, but after Elimelech. He also died without issue, but without Levirate benefit. His name was blotted out.

Notice, the author said that "they went to Moab." This was said in a matter-of-fact manner which could be deceiving. The people of Israel were to stay within their own land and were forbidden to have any dealings with Moabites. This, of course, Elimelech rejected.

## STANDING ALONE, BUT NEVER LONELY

Although there was famine in the land of Judah, it was not necessary for Elimelech to take his family to Moab. The other people of Bethlehem felt the famine as much as Elimelech, but they did not leave Canaan. This was clearly disobedience.

The author continues the story in the next verse.

*Now Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died, and she had only her two sons. Ruth 1:3*

At the death of the father of the family, the elder son, Mahlon, would become the heir and take control of the family. His brother would be at his right hand. Ruth would be charged with the care of the household with Naomi in a kind of emeritus role. Because Naomi was older, she would have age respect from all of them. The family could go on and sustain itself in this arrangement during the lifetime of the sons.

The thing that any widow worried about finally happened to Naomi.

*They married Moabite women. One married Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, both Mahlon and Chilion also died, and Naomi had neither her two sons nor her husband. Ruth 1:4, 5*

These verses could mean that Mahlon and Chilion did not marry until their father had died. That is possible, but not probable. It was considered a sin to go to Moab because they were not to pray for the peace of Moab or Ammon. These people rather than helping Israel return to the land and giving them food, refused them passage. To dwell in Moab would require the regular greeting of shalom to their neighbors, and this was strictly forbidden.

The sin was compounded if one **married** a Moabite!

Notice that Orpah was named first. This usually meant that she had married into the family first. If true, then this was a serious breach of custom because her husband was younger than Mahlon who married Ruth.

There are some Jewish scholars who believe that Elimelech became wealthy and powerful in Moab. They also believe that the king, Eglon, (see Judges 3:19), gave his daughters to Elimelech's sons to arrange for treaty and respect. The fact that these two young men had married Moabite wives would make it impossible for them to ever return to Canaan.

Think about this situation for a moment. Elimelech knew that it was wrong for him to leave Canaan. He had to know it was even worse to go to Moab. It was still worse that he married both his sons to Moabite women. Add to this the fact that Elimelech came from Bethlehem, one of the areas least devastated by the drought.

Again, Elimelech had to know that when he married his sons to Moabite women, he forever precluded his or his family's return to the Land of Promise. Ezra, in Ezra 9:12, dealt with people who had done as Elimelech had done. In that instance, the guilty men had to put away both their wives and their children. Though Elimelech's actions were stated matter-of-factly, it represented a most serious error.

The text does not comment directly on the spiritual life of Elimelech or his family, but there are some indirect indications of their outlook.

## NAOMI RETURNS FROM MOAB TO BETHLEHEM

- They voluntarily left the land God had given them, without being instructed by God to do so. This suggests that he did not take God's gift too seriously.
- The fact that he went to Moab, a people God put under a curse forever, suggests that Elimelech did not take God's actions seriously.
- The fact that Elimelech gave both his sons in marriage to women from Moab suggests that he had no intentions of ever returning to Israel. It was forbidden for a Moabite to enter the land of Canaan.

It is not surprising that the author says, in verses three and five, that Elimelech and his two sons died in Moab. They never had an opportunity to return even if they had so chosen.

*Both Mahlon and Chilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband. Ruth 1:5*

When Elimelech died, the two sons cared for Naomi. Control of the family passed into the hands of her eldest son, Mahlon, and she knew she had nothing to fear as long as the two sons lived.

Now, however, both sons had died and neither of them had a son to take control of the family. At this point, Naomi, as well as Orpah and Ruth, faced a crisis with no one to care for her. There was no way that they could survive in such a hostile environment without the protective care of a male relative or benefactor.

### **Ruth 1:6-14 - Naomi Begins Her Return to Bethlehem**

Notice that several verses in this paragraph begin with the word "then" and the word "and." It reminds us of the Gospel of Mark. This tells us something about the writing. The author is giving us historical information, but does not attempt to give every detail. He gives only enough historical information to support the basic idea he was trying to convey in the book, but in rapid-fire order.

*When she heard in Moab that the LORD had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, Naomi and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there. Ruth 1:6*

There is a dilemma in verse six. Naomi couldn't survive without a man in her enclave, which would guarantee their safety. It would also guarantee access to water supply. If women came to a well alone, they would be refused the use of it by the men who also wanted to use the water from the same well. In Genesis 29:1-8, when Jacob arrived at Paddan-Aram, the text suggests that they covered the well with a stone too huge for women to move. Available water was a vital concern among desert people. Naomi wisely chose the only viable option - the hazardous trip back to Bethlehem. Three women traveling alone, in such a pagan area, could expect to face danger, if not death.

Notice that Naomi had received news of conditions in Canaan. We tend to think of desert life in 1000 BC as unbelievably isolated. It was. Communications, however, were surprisingly good given their primitive conditions. News from Canaan was quite promising. As we said earlier, life had been difficult in Canaan for two reasons:

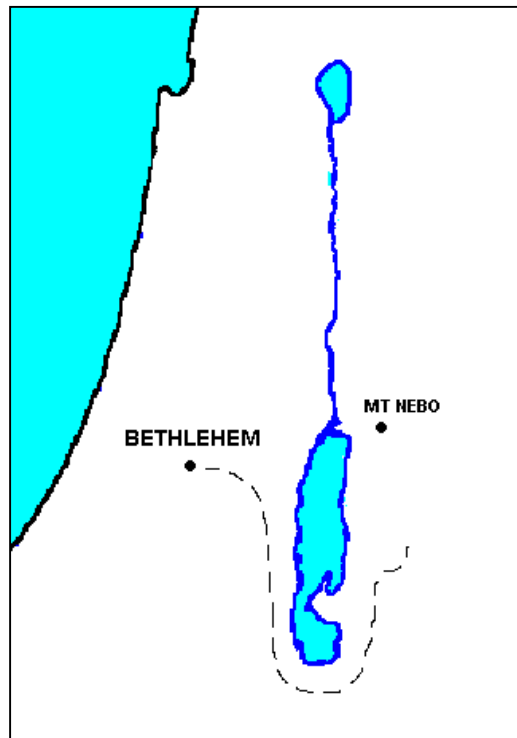
## STANDING ALONE, BUT NEVER LONELY

- The Jews were oppressed by the former inhabitants of the land whom they failed to kill or drive out.
- There had been a drought and famine in the land for several years.

Verse six suggests that more positive conditions had been reported in both these areas. Having heard this news, Naomi acted immediately.

*With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah. Ruth 1:7*

The following map shows the probable route Naomi, Ruth and Orpah took as the trip began.



We cannot be certain where Elimelech settled in Moab, but it is probable that it was somewhere south of Mt. Nebo on the map. This would mean that the three women would have to travel through rugged terrain.

Certainly, Elimelech's family had herds of sheep and/or goats before Mahlon and Chilion died. Did they travel with at least some of these animals or did they sell all of them to make travel easier? We don't know. It seems reasonable to assume that they kept some animals to provide food for the journey.

*Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the LORD show kindness to you, as you have shown to your dead and to me." Ruth 1:8*

One wonders why Naomi did not suggest that her daughters-in-law go home before she started the journey. We can't be certain. It is possible she did suggest it, but the author

## NAOMI RETURNS FROM MOAB TO BETHLEHEM

did not report it. It is just as possible that she began to see how difficult the journey was and wanted to spare them such hardship. Whatever the reason, the three started the arduous trip from Moab to Judah.

Notice that Naomi suggested that the daughters-in-law return to their "mother's tent." There may be several reasons Naomi designated their "mother's tent," but two come to mind:

- People attribute compassion and understanding to mothers.
- In desert tents, one section was designated as the "mother's tent." The girls in the family would sleep there. If Ruth and Orpah went back to their families, they might stay in their mother's tent.

Naomi's blessing is both beautiful and surprising. It tells you something about their family relationships. In the eastern part of the world, mothers have a poor reputation in dealing with their daughters-in-law. Mothers were often harsh, cold and unfeeling toward their son's wives. Often mothers-in-law treated their son's wives as servants, as property.

This was not true with Naomi. Her blessing upon Ruth and Orpah made it clear that these women had treated her and her sons quite well. Verbal or physical abuse was not a part of their relationship. This was unusual in that culture.

One begins to get a picture of Naomi as a gracious, loving woman who feared God. The actions of her husband, on the other hand, were anything but God fearing. This makes it even more surprising that she could be the servant of God she obviously was.

At this point, the author made no direct statement concerning the attitude of Ruth and Orpah toward the worship of Israel's God. Whatever that may be, Naomi did not hesitate to speak to them about the blessing of God on their lives.

However, there is a dilemma at this point. Naomi invoked the blessing of God upon two Moabite women in Ruth 1:8, 9. It needs to be pointed out that the law strictly forbids blessing a Moabite (male), but it does not forbid blessing a Moabite (female). In spite of this, the very conservative Jewish people of Bethlehem could be expected to go beyond the demand of the law to exclude both. In Deuteronomy 23:3, Moses made it clear that the Ammonites and Moabites could not enter the assembly of the LORD. This was because instead of offering Israel food, when they traveled from Egypt to Canaan, they refused them passage through the land. Israelites were not to seek peace or good relations with them as long as they lived. Notice what Naomi said:

*"May the Lord show kindness to you as you have shown to your dead and to me. May the Lord grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband." Then she kissed them and they wept aloud Ruth 1:8, 9*

The blessing was beautiful to say the least. The content of this blessing gives us some important information about the relationship between them:

- She wished them kindness as they had shown to the deceased and to her. This was an unusual relationship. It says something very complimentary about the two wives and about Naomi.

## STANDING ALONE, BUT NEVER LONELY

- Naomi wished them rest in the home of a new husband. Many a mother-in-law would want the wives to remain with her and help take care of her. This says something very important about how Naomi felt about the widows of her sons.

The ancient Rabbis offered an instruction that is still followed: A potential proselyte should be discouraged at least three times from committing himself/herself to Judaism. Modern Jewish scholars hold three distinct positions about Ruth 1:8, 9:

- This was Naomi's first discouragement of her Moabite daughters-in-law.
- Others believe Naomi was embarrassed to bring Moabite women into Israel because of the national bias. She therefore might encourage them to go home.
- Others believe Naomi was simply being honest with Ruth and Orpah.

Obviously, the text does not deal specifically with this issue.

One thing Ruth and Orpah could have done was to accept the legal marriage settlement to which they were entitled, in such circumstances, and go on their way.

In verse nine, the name "LORD" is "Jehovah" (יהוה) - the Eternal God of Justice. The use of this name suggests that Naomi appealed to God the righteous judge, to bless these women because of their faithfulness to her and to her sons.

The text says that Naomi kissed Ruth and Orpah. In that culture the kiss was a symbol of acceptance and forgiveness. Naomi's kiss told Ruth and Orpah that the relationship among the three of them was amiable. The use of the kiss as a symbol of acceptance and friendship is still practiced in eastern cultures and those European cultures heavily influenced by eastern cultures. This is most visible when dignitaries from a foreign country are welcomed.

Weeping, in eastern cultures, is an expression of unspeakable sorrow. In the time of Jesus, professional wailers were hired to mourn the death of a loved one. There was sorrow for the three women at the possibility of separation. There was probably as much symbol as sorrow, but the sorrow was real.

In verse ten, Ruth and Orpah responded to Naomi's suggestion.

*Then she kissed them and they wept aloud and said to her, "We will go back with you to your people." Ruth 1:9b, 10*

We do not easily understand their culture. In our time, a woman would usually think of her parents as her primary family when her husband dies. That was not true in the Near East. They more often thought of becoming a part of the husband's family for life. In either instance, the widow presented a hardship for either family with which she identified. It appears that both women saw their participation in their husband's family as permanent.

Verse eleven may seem strange to us, but Naomi was dealing with a serious situation.

*But Naomi said, "Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands?" Ruth 1:11*

This was Naomi's second attempt to get the two women to turn back to their mother's tent. She dealt with a tradition of that culture. In Genesis 38, Judah's first born son, Er, died.

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His wife, Tamar, was given to Onan, according to Levirate law. (This law grew out of a problem that existed among the people of Israel. It was considered a tragedy if a man died before he had a son to carry on his name. Because of the shortness and fragile quality of life, this tragedy occurred with some frequency. The Levirate law required the closest male in the family to take his brother's wife into his home and father a son by her. This son was considered the son of the deceased brother. (In this manner the name of the deceased would not be cut off.) In this instance, Onan refused to father a son on behalf of his dead brother Er, and he also died. Judah had only a very young son left and was afraid if he gave Shelah as husband to Tamar, he, too, might die. Judah urged Tamar to go to her father's home until Shelah was of age. These were normal understandings in that culture.

It was impossible for a widow to survive on her own. She could not defend herself physically against thieves and those who would take advantage of her. She could not gain access to the water supply because she would be physically unable to remove the stone slab that covered the mouth of the well. She would turn to her husband's family to find an available husband. Failing this, she would turn to her father's family. If she was unsuccessful or unwelcome there, her only hope of survival was to become a prostitute or die. Naomi stressed the fact that she had no sons to give them.

Without giving the two women an opportunity to answer, Naomi tried to dissuade them a third time.

*"Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me - even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons - would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the LORD'S hand has gone out against me!" Ruth 1:12, 13*

There is more urgency in her words this time. Naomi assumed that their reason for staying was simply to find another husband. It would not make sense to follow the motives suggested by Naomi. She had no sons to give them. If she conceived a son immediately, the two women could not wait until the sons grew up to marry them. At that point, both Ruth and Orpah would be too old to bear children. Naomi pointed out the folly of their following her.

In verse thirteen, Naomi gave us a glimpse into her own mind and heart.

*It is more bitter for me than for you, because the LORD'S hand has gone out against me! Ruth 1:13c*

She has lost her husband and two sons. Now she had the responsibility of providing for two daughters-in-law. She was right; it was harder for her than for them. Naomi used the word "marah" or (מָרָה) which means bitter, angry, chafed, heavy, discontent.

Naomi also ascribed her condition to "the LORD." The name Naomi used for God is "Jehovah." This name is repeatedly used in situations where judgment was discussed. Notice also that this sentence contains the idea of judgment - "The hand of the LORD has gone forth against me." Very often the Old Testament mentioned the idea of "the hand" of God in situations which involved great use of divine power, especially expressions of judgment.

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The question arises, why would God judge the family of Elimelech when he was dead? Part of the nature of evil is the fact that it never takes place in a vacuum. It always has consequences for succeeding generations. Naomi's words sound as though God was punishing her for the actions of her husband. This was not true. One characteristic of disobedience is that every rebellious act has its inherent cost, its inevitable consequence, no matter whether the guilty party is present or not. Judgment should be seen as a choice of the rebel rather than an act of an overly angry God.

As we hinted earlier, this was Naomi's third attempt to dissuade the two women from following her. Following meant more than going where Naomi went. It meant adopting her entire way of life, including the worship of God. This fact figured in Naomi's thinking to some extent.

Ruth and Orpah responded in a way that would have been shocking and created an aura of envy in other families of that day.

*At this they wept again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her. Ruth 1:14*

Though such an emotional response was not necessarily spontaneous, this expression was quite real. Intense weeping, on such occasions, was their cultural way to express the depths of sorrow they experienced. It was real. These women felt sorrow at being separated from Naomi and from each other.

The responses of Ruth and Orpah to Naomi's third attempt to dissuade them from following her were very different, but quite symbolic.

**Orpah kissed Naomi.** This was the cultural symbol that there was trust and forgiveness between the two women. Few families, in that era, could expect such an open, honest exchange. This was also Orpah's announcement that she would do as Naomi urged. It meant that she would go back to her father's home. It also meant that she would cease worshipping the God of Israel and return to the idol worship of her childhood.

**Ruth clung to Naomi** - Ruth's actions were also symbolic. Ruth responded in a very delicate way. In every household, the mother held control of the children and the wives of her sons. The daughters-in-law were expected to obey her as they would their own mother. Ruth needed to find a way to show Naomi that her choice to stay, though contrary to Naomi's instructions, was a choice of love and not rebellion. She accomplished this goal by clinging to Naomi.

One wonders what the relationship was when Ruth and Orpah realized that they had made opposite choices. This would be an even more intense situation if the two were in fact sisters.

### **Ruth 1:15-18 - Ruth Declared Allegiance to Naomi and God**

Naomi's reaction to Ruth's response was one of surprise, if not shock. Naomi had described the situation in reasonable terms. In view of Naomi's statement, Ruth's response made little sense.

*"Look," said Naomi, "your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her." Ruth 1:15*



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Naomi tried to explain one more time. She appealed to Ruth based on Orpah's choice. Naomi hoped that the fact Orpah had chosen to accept her suggestion would lend credibility to the idea in the mind of Ruth. It did not work.

Verse 15 sounds as though Naomi wants Ruth to be an idolater. This was not her emphasis. Naomi was urging Ruth to return to her former way of life. If Ruth did that, she must serve the idols of her parent's culture.

Naomi was trying to deal realistically with two very large problems:

- Naomi would have difficulty sustaining her own life let alone being responsible for Ruth also.
- Naomi was in a difficult situation because Ruth would not leave and Naomi was afraid to take a Moabitess into Bethlehem. That was unacceptable and probably dangerous. Her last hope of solving the dilemma was lost when Ruth rejected the idea of returning to her parents' home.

Ruth's response to Naomi's entreaty is well known, but not well understood.

*But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely if anything but death separates you and me." Ruth 1:16, 17*

Notice that verse 16 begins with the word "but." This suggests a direct contrast between the content of verse 15 - Naomi's entreaty for Ruth to leave - and verse 16 - Ruth's promise to stay with Naomi.

It was a delicate matter for Ruth to disagree with her mother-in-law. She accomplished it in a direct, but acceptable manner. If you look carefully at these two verses, you can see that Ruth accomplished this by six affirmations followed by an oath. Whether Naomi thought Ruth's decision was wise or not, she clearly understood that it was final. These six affirmations were carefully chosen.

**"Where you go I will go."** Ruth was making an irreversible covenant that she would not leave Naomi. Like it or not, Naomi could count on the ongoing presence of Ruth. It was a pledge that Ruth would follow her and serve her as long as she lived.

**"Where you stay I will stay."** The word "stay" is "leen" (לֵּן) which refers to a place to stay the night. It often describes a very temporary location. It suggests an apparent willingness to pursue a nomadic life, if necessary, in order to survive with Naomi. This second statement is more intensely designed to show Ruth's determination not just to be in the same location, but to be family. The statement, "where you stay" rather than "where you live," also suggests that Ruth had not decided to go with Naomi in the hope of living in a permanent house, rather than a tent as they now lived. There is determination in Ruth's oath and it is very intentional.

**"Your people will be my people."** The literal statement is "Your people my people." This is a statement of identity. This is the clearest indication that Ruth has given of her intention. It is not that she is going to just carry out her marriage vows. She is determined

to become a Jewess. "Your people my people" is more than a nationality. Speaking carefully, being a Jew must include the worship of the God of Israel. Ruth was committed to her husband's family. The root of her commitment, however, went much deeper than family loyalty. Ruth's next statement, then, could not possibly be a surprise.

**"Your God my God."** Ruth continued to extend the boundaries of her commitment. She had grown up in a family committed to idolatrous worship. In her marriage she was required to worship her husband's God. Now she was free to make her own choice. She chose to commit herself to the worship of Jehovah, the God of Israel. This commitment, for the first time in her life, was made not because of family or culture, but out of personal desire.

**"Where you die I will die."** Ruth could be motivated by her concern for her mother-in-law. This statement makes Ruth's intentions clear. Naomi will probably die before she does. Ruth is promising that Naomi's death will signal no changes in her activities. She will live in Israel as long as Naomi lives. When Naomi dies nothing will change. Ruth's commitment is not just to Naomi, but to God and His people Israel. Ruth will not run to her family in Moab when Naomi, her last contact with her husband's family, dies. Ruth intends to stay in Israel and die there.

**"There I will be buried."** Ruth had not only learned of the God of Israel, but had accepted Jewish values as well. It was very important for a Jew to be buried in Israel. This was a religious statement, not a sentimental expression. Joseph required his family to take an oath that they would take his bones back to Israel. It was an expression of Joseph's faith that God would take them back to the Land of Promise and he wanted to be part of that experience. Ruth had committed as much of her life to God and Israel as it was possible for her to covenant - she would be buried in the land, with Naomi's family.

Ruth made one final step in her oath. She said,

*"May the LORD (Jehovah) deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me." Ruth 1:17b*

As a final gesture of conviction, Ruth calls upon Jehovah, the Eternal God of Judgment, to punish her should she break this dramatic oath. The demonstration of unusual conviction and resolve was not unique with Ruth. This was the way a person who was serious about his/her oath would show that fact. Having said this, it should be noted that such an oath was not taken lightly. They believed that if anyone violated such an oath, Jehovah would indeed punish them as they had vowed.

Observe that Ruth called upon the name of Jehovah - the Eternal God of Judgment. She could have softened the oath's tone, calling on the name of Elohim - The Majestic God of Mercy. Ruth's choice was intentional. If a person means what they say, they do not need to search for soft resolves. Ruth made it clear she meant exactly what she said.

Put yourself in Naomi's position. How would you feel having heard such an oath? The text shares at least some of Naomi's response.

*When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her. Ruth 1:18*

## NAOMI RETURNS FROM MOAB TO BETHLEHEM

The author reported that Naomi saw that Ruth was "determined to go with her..." The word "determined" is "amats" (אָמַט). It is the root word which means "to be very courageous, to fortify, to harden one's resolve, to be absolutely obstinate in a good sense. Naomi was thoroughly convinced that nothing could ever change Ruth's mind about her vow. In such a situation, Naomi could have demanded that Ruth do as she had previously requested. This would have created an impasse. This would neither be characteristic of Naomi nor of her relationship with her daughter-in-law.

A second feeling which must have come to Naomi's mind, though the text does not mention it, is a perplexity over how she would deal with bringing a Moabite daughter-in-law into Bethlehem. Naomi had no reason to believe that her extended family would accept such a flagrant disregard for what they understood to be the teaching of Scripture. She certainly must have wondered how she could hope to provide for herself and her daughter-in-law while living among hostile relatives. The fact that relatives would assist in her care alone would be surprising. Add to this situation the presence of a Moabite and you have an almost impossible scenario.

Remember, Naomi is old. It is possible that Elimelech's family would tolerate the presence of a Moabite daughter-in-law while Naomi was alive. Naomi had to wonder what the family would do when she died.

These and many other considerations had to flood through Naomi's mind. Nevertheless, when it was clear to her that Ruth had a moral determination to persevere in her oath, Naomi accepted it and said no more to her about it. This was astounding! Most any other mother-in-law would have hounded Ruth until, in desperation, she complied with Naomi's wishes. Naomi was different. She did not need to exert power over others to make her decisions easier.

The text suggests that Ruth will now accompany Naomi to her home village of Bethlehem. It is, however, more than that. Ruth had announced her choice to worship Naomi's God. Ruth had chosen to become a Jewess. It was rare for anyone to become a Jew. It was even more unusual for a widow to make such a choice. It was still more unusual for a Moabitess to make this choice.

### **Ruth 1:19-22 - Naomi and Ruth Arrive in Bethlehem**

In the Hebrew text, this paragraph begins with the word "and." This is unusual in written English, but not in everyday speech which reports events. This suggests that verse 19, the travel of Naomi and Ruth to Bethlehem, was an integral part of the previous idea of verse 18, Naomi's acceptance of the idea that Ruth was determined to become a Jewess and live in Israel. It may not seem like much to us, but Ruth would probably be the only native of Moab living in Israel.

Notice the way verse 19 is written.

*So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them, and the women exclaimed, "Can this be Naomi?" Ruth 1:9*

The English wording of the verse sounds awkward and redundant. This use of repetition is one way the Hebrew provides emphasis. It is a way to stress the intensity of their trip

from Moab westward to Canaan. There were caravans that traveled from Moab through Israel and on to Egypt, but they were few. This was the safest way to travel. It is possible that this emphasis suggests that the two women were forced to travel alone without benefit of the safety of a caravan.

The author also describes the reception Naomi and Ruth received in Bethlehem. The New International Version says "the whole town was stirred because of them." The Hebrew text uses the word "hoom" (הוּם) which means "to make an uproar," "to agitate greatly," "to destroy," "to make a great noise." This describes an unusual disturbance in this small village.

The question naturally arises, what is the nature of this great disturbance? Is the disturbance due to the presence of a Moabite woman in this very strict Jewish community which rejects such a presence? The text does not say, but there was probably some of this. Could the shock be the difference between the wealth and position with which Naomi left Bethlehem twenty years earlier and the impoverished way she has now returned? It is probable that this was **at least part** of the stir that took place when the people saw Naomi. It could also be that they were surprised that she came back in view of the way in which the family left Bethlehem to go to Moab.

The New International Version says "and the women exclaimed." We should note that the word "women" does not appear in the Hebrew text. It simply says, "and **they** said." The word "they," however, has a feminine ending. It is appropriate to understand this to refer to women. The women said, "Can this be Naomi?" Whatever else is conveyed by this statement, these women of Bethlehem are shocked. For whatever reason, their question is one of disbelief.

It would be more likely for the women to ask, "Is this Elimelech's wife?" The use of the name "Naomi," however, is a play on words. The name "Naomi" means "pleasant." Her impoverished appearance, and her tragic situation in life were anything but pleasant. This is not strong evidence, but it seems appropriate.

Naomi's reply is part of the basis for thinking that the reference in verse 19, was intentional.

*"Don't call me Naomi," she told them. "Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter." Ruth 1:20*

Naomi's response could be understood as an angry retort, but there are other possibilities:

- It could be simply an honest evaluation of life as she experienced it.
- It could be an angry response
- It could be the response of deep sorrow.
- It appears to be a confession through scalding tears and burning memories.

Remember, her husband took his family and, contrary to God's instructions, left the land God had given them to live among pagans. He violated the Scriptural injunction against blessing people from Moab and even married his two sons to Moabite women, thus precluding their return to Israel. Now the consequences of his actions are showing their painful presence. Thus she could say of her name, "Do not call me Naomi." She felt like any-

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thing but pleasant. She urged her former friends, to call her “Mara”, which means bitter, angry, chafed or **heavy**. It appears that Naomi's feeling had more to do with heaviness than with anger or bitterness.

In verse 20, Naomi reveals her understanding of the tragedies of her life - "The Almighty has made my life very bitter." The name for God, in her response, is "Shaddai" (שַׁדַּי). It means Almighty, and comes from the root word which means powerful, impregnable, to spoil or lay waste. It describes a force so great that it is irresistible. Naomi said that God, Who is so powerful that He is irresistible, was visiting her life with heaviness and sorrow almost too great to be borne. She saw a cause and effect relationship. Her husband knowingly disobeyed the command of God. Disobedience always produces judgment, the consequences of rebellious actions. She was all that was left of that disobedient family and the natural result of disobedience was visited upon her.

In the next verse, Naomi explained her statement.

*“I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The LORD has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.”*  
*Ruth 1:21*

Naomi's statement, "I went away full..." suggests something of the wealth of the family at the time they left Bethlehem to go to Moab. Naomi's statement is a strong contrast. The use of the word "but," is a clear signal of this contrast. It is a before-and-after picture. In the second part of this sentence, the contrast is more than just the opposite of the first part. Let me describe the difference.

**THE FIRST PART** - She claimed that she left Bethlehem and the land of Israel with so much that she lacked for nothing. There is no mention of whom was responsible for this blessed situation. It just was.

### **BUT**

**THE SECOND PART** - She immediately ascribed responsibility for the present dire circumstances to the actions of "the LORD." Interestingly, the name "LORD" "Jehovah" is the name for God which is most often employed in situations involving judgment.

"The LORD has brought me back empty." Her impoverished condition was an action of Jehovah. Naomi spoke of more than possessions. She left with a husband, but she returned a widow. She left the land with two sons, but she returned with only their memory. She left Bethlehem the wife of a very wealthy man. She returned impoverished. She and Ruth would have to depend upon the generosity of family members in order to survive.

Naomi was not only identifying her calamity, she was stressing it with all the force her skills and language would allow. She was taking ownership of a decision that her husband, Elimelech, had certainly made. She accepted the judgment God brought upon her for their disobedience - leaving Canaan and having dealings with Moabites and even entering into marriage contracts with Moabites for both her sons.

We should not be surprised when Naomi asked a second time, "Why do you call me Naomi?" This may be difficult for us. We would be tempted to respond in confusion, "We would call you Naomi because that is your name." In our culture, a name is a name.

Most of us do not know the meaning of our names. In Naomi's culture, the name described the person. This was the idea behind the changing of the name from "Saul" to "Paul" when he became a Christian. The name Naomi once described her life perfectly. Now it did not describe her life at all.

In her second statement in this verse, Naomi used two different names for God - Jehovah and Shaddai. Look carefully at the vividness of her words. Naomi said, "The LORD has witnessed against me." As we suggested before, the name "LORD" is often associated with situations of judgment. Naomi carefully described a court scene. The words "witnessed against me" come from the word "anah" (אָנָה) which literally means "to eye," "to observe carefully," "to look down upon," "to brow beat," "to testify against." In the Jewish judicial system, an accuser must look the accused in the face and make a positive identification of this individual as the guilty party. In effect, Naomi said that God, the judge, had looked her in the eye and pronounced her guilty of severe wrongdoing.

The last part of her statement sounds like a restatement of the first, but it is quite different. It was called a parallelism and was used very often in the Psalms for purposes of emphasis. In this last portion of her recitation of pain, Naomi used the name "Shaddai." This name describes a power which is so great it is invincible. "The all powerful God has afflicted me." Naomi's words were vivid, devastating. The word "afflicted" is "raah" (רָעָה) and literally means "to break in pieces," "to render something/someone good for nothing," "to punish totally." God did not just punish Naomi, He totally destroyed her. In view of this, Naomi asked, "How could you possibly call me Naomi?"

Put yourself in Naomi's position. There are both ownership and great pain in her words, but there is also fire. Remember, in that culture, a decision to leave the land would usually be made by the husband without consulting his wife at all. Now, however, Naomi has been punished - bereft of husband, sons and great wealth - because of her husband's decision. We must remember that evil never takes place in a vacuum. The alcoholic sins, but his/her family suffers as much or more than the guilty party. This situation describes the hideous quality of sin rather than the lack of divine fairness.

Naomi used the name "LORD" to describe God's judgment of her and the name "Shaddai" to describe the severity of God's punishment of her life.

There appears to be a redundancy in the closing verse of chapter one.

*So Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning. Ruth 1:22*

Actually, there is emphasis here, but not redundancy. The author is writing very carefully. He first reported that Naomi "returned." The word "returned" is "shoob" (שׁוּב) which means "to turn back," "to retreat from an unfortunate direction." Elimelech took his family into Moab, into disobedience. The author said Naomi turned away from such evil ways and returned to Canaan, to obedience.

The author then focused his attention on Ruth. He begins the description by reminding us that Ruth was a Moabitess. This emphasis gives us two pieces of information:

- Ruth was a Moabitess - she came from a land under a divine curse.

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- According to many Jewish scholars, the fact that she was a "Moabite" (female) and not a "Moabite" (male) excludes her from the ban on blessing or on entering the land of Canaan.

The author used the same word "return" to describe Ruth's coming to Bethlehem as he used to describe the return of Naomi. The question arises, Why did he repeat the word "return"? The two "returns" are quite different. The picture of Naomi is one of turning away from an evil lifestyle and going back to a life of obedience, in the land in which she once lived. The situation for Ruth was different. She came out of an idolatrous background and sought to become a Jewess; she sought to live a Jewish life of obedience for the very first time. Ruth is not going home as Naomi was. Ruth converted from idolatry to the worship of the God of Israel and a determination to become a Jewess despite her probable royal background in Moab. The author used the word "returned" in two different ways:

- It was used to describe Naomi's rejection of a life of disobedience, not just a return to Bethlehem.
- It described Ruth's change from a life of idolatry to a life of obedience to the God of Israel.

The concluding sentence in this paragraph can easily be overlooked. It appears to simply identify the time of year when Naomi and Ruth arrived in Bethlehem. This brief sentence provides at least two additional pieces of information for us:

- Naomi and Ruth arrived at the beginning of the barley harvest. This is in the month of Nissan and roughly parallels our Easter season. This means that the harvest time was at hand and it would be nearly a year before they could harvest their own crops. They would need to find some way to survive during that long period of time.
- "Barley harvest" has great spiritual significance for Jewish people. Exodus 9:31 suggests that the plagues came upon Egypt when the barley "was in the ear," and nearly ready for harvest. "Barley harvest" and the time of redemption/restoration, "Passover," were nearly synonymous in the Jewish mind. It is as though the author said, "Naomi returned from her time of misdirection in Moab and experienced the restoration of God."

### Review of personalities

#### Naomi

- 1:6 **Believer** - She believed God had mercy on Israel - ending the drought.
- 1:8 **Kind** - She wished God's blessing on Ruth and Orpah
- 1:8 **Appreciative** - She appreciated what her daughters-in-law had done.
- 1:9 **Forgiving** - She kissed Ruth and Orpah goodbye - a sign they were at peace with each other.
- 1:11 **Sacrificial** - She urged her daughters-in-law to go home when it would be harder for her.

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1:13 **Eager to help** - She kept trying to persuade Ruth and Orpah to go back to their families.

1:18 **Sensitive** - When it was clear Ruth would not leave, she stopped urging.

1:20 **Honest** - "Don't call me Naomi... call me Mara."

1:21 **Faithful** - She served God even when she thought He was punishing her.

### Ruth

1:9 **Loving** - She wept when Naomi told her to go home.

1:14 **Loyal** - She clung to Naomi though it might mean an even harder life.

1:16 **Determined** - None of Naomi's attempts to get her to go home could change her mind.

1:16 **Spiritual** - "Your God is my God."

1:16 **Faithful** - "Where you die, I will die."

1:17 **Honest** - She invited God to punish her severely if she failed to keep her oath.

### Boaz

Because of the progress of the story, Boaz is not mentioned in chapter one.

Biblical books which are historical in nature, follow a definite pattern: They use historical settings and events to tell us something specific about God. The book of Ruth is one of these books. In this chapter of the story of Ruth, the author tells us some important things about God:

- **1:6 - Powerful** - The author suggests that the Lord had come to the aid of the people of Israel by giving relief from famine and providing food for them. This tells us that God is powerful over nature. It also tells us that God was merciful to Israel although they had been most disobedient.
- **1:8 - Kind** - When Naomi urged Orpah and Ruth to return to their homes, she called upon Jehovah to show kindness to them. Many people see only an angry, vengeful God in the Old Testament. Naomi knew the kindness of God to be real in life.
- **1:9 - Generous** - Naomi also asked God to provide new husbands for Ruth and Orpah and that these women would be at rest in their new homes. Naomi knew God to be compassionate, given to blessing, concerned about every detail of life.
- **1:13 - Punishes** - Describing the pain of her life, Naomi said Jehovah's hand had gone out against her. This compassionate and merciful God was also a God of justice. Though God is merciful, evil will not go unpunished.
- **1:16- Personal** - Ruth declared her allegiance to the God of Israel. She knew that though God (Elohim - the God of Mercy) was powerful over all nations and deities, He was also a very personal God - "your God, my God."
- **1:17 - Judges with compassion** - Ruth ended her allegiance to Naomi and to God with an oath that called upon God to mediate her oath and judge her if she failed to



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keep her promise. God was intimately involved in the relationships of His people with each other. He is the judge who carries out judgment with compassion.

- **1:20 - Almighty** - Naomi said, "The Almighty has made my life very bitter." Identifying God as the Almighty is to say there is no power in all creation as strong as He is. This power will punish evil and it will not be pleasant. Nevertheless, the judgment of God will always be motivated by a desire to draw us back to an obedient relationship with Himself.
- **1:21 - Judges** - Naomi said, "The Lord has brought me back empty." The Lord - Jehovah - will allow the disobedient to prosper, but eventually He will judge disobedience and remove everything a rebellious life accumulated. Notice that even in His judgment, His purpose was to bring His people back to Himself.
- Naomi said, "The Lord has afflicted me." As we said earlier, this quotation really says, "the Lord (the judge) has witnessed against me." To witness against has two parts: It is to provide evidence in trial. It also pictures the judge who passes sentence, carries out justice against the guilty. Ruth, like many books of the Bible, presents God as both "Jehovah" and "Elohim;" as both "the dispenser of justice" and "the God of Mercy."
- **1:21 - Eternal** - He is "Lord" "Jehovah."

### Conclusion

God is mentioned six times in this chapter. All six references statements by Ruth or Naomi. Two of these statements involve Naomi's blessing upon her daughters-in-law. One of these references to God is the statement of a covenant. The remaining three statements are Naomi's description of how the Lord has afflicted her

Five of the six references use the name "LORD." This name speaks of God as eternal. This name is repeatedly used in situations where judgment was being described. In Exodus 3:14, at the burning bush, Moses was looking for a way to avoid what God called him to do. In that discussion, Moses asked God what he should say if the Israelites asked him the name of the God of their father's. God's answer was interesting.

*God Said to Moses, "I am (Jehovah) who I am (Jehovah). This is what you are to say to the Israelites: "I am (Jehovah) has sent me." Exodus 3:14*

This is an emphasis on the eternity of God.

When Ruth covenanted with Naomi that "your God my God," she used the name Elohim which stresses the fact that God is both all powerful. This name was used repeatedly in situations where the mercy of God has been described.

In verse 21, Naomi used both the name "Lord," "Jehovah" and the name "Almighty" "Shaddai." It was a way to stress both the fact that the eternal God judges, and the fact that He is Almighty.

Repeatedly through the Old Testament, the name "Jehovah" is used in contexts which involved the necessary exercise of judgment.

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In the opening chapters of Genesis, the name for God is "Elohim" (the God of Mercy), or "Jehovah Elohim." In the contexts of judgment - the Fall, the flood, the tower of Babel - the name for God immediately changes to "Jehovah."

In Ruth 2:12, where Boaz pronounces a blessing upon Ruth, he referred to God as the Lord (Jehovah), the God (Elohim) of Israel." This is an interesting picture of God. It is like saying that the God of Israel is a merciful judge. What a beautiful picture of our God.

The book of Ruth also speaks about God without mentioning His name. The whole thrust of the book deals with the interaction between God and His people. Ruth was obedient to the worship of God and the way of life God urged his people to live. Throughout this chapter, Ruth sought ways to serve her mother-in-law. God blessed her richly through the friendship of Naomi and the kindness of Boaz. God is kind and merciful to those who serve him. God works through those who serve and obey Him - Boaz and Naomi - to bless and encourage others who serve him (Ruth).

What does all of this say to us? Repeated over and over in this book are two pictures of God that are intertwined and always present. In His holiness, He will always judge our disobedience so as to bring us back to Himself. However, in His justice He is filled with compassion and motivated by mercy, not fury. This is the foundation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ that we proclaim today.

In view of the picture of who God is, as presented in the Scriptures, what are you determined to do? To become?

## QUESTIONS FOR RUTH LESSON 2

### RUTH 2:1 – 23

#### RUTH GLEANED THE FIELDS OF BOAZ

1. In our best documents there are four paragraphs in Ruth, chapter two. On the table below, write a title of seven words or less for each paragraph.

2:1 – 7	
2:8 – 13	
2:14 – 16	
2:17 – 23	

2. In Ruth 2:1-7, the author described Ruth's gleaning in the field of Boaz.
- Ruth 2:1 gives information about the position of Boaz in the clan of Elimelech.
    - How does the author describe Boaz' position?
    - Read verse one several times. Write this verse in your own words in such a way that you explain the author's apparent duplication "a relative on her husband's side, from the clan of Elimelech."
    - What did the author mean when he said, "... a man of standing"?
  - In 2:2, the author reminds us that Ruth was a Moabitess.
    - Why would that be necessary?
    - Why would Ruth need to request permission from Naomi to glean in the harvest fields?
    - Study Naomi's reply - "Go ahead my daughter." What did you learn from this response?
    - What did Ruth mean when she said, "...behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor?"
  - In Ruth 2:3, the author said, "as it turned out..." What could he mean by this statement?
  - In 2:3, the author reminds us, again, that Boaz was from the clan of Elimelech.
    - Why would he repeat this information?
    - What does this add to our knowledge?
  - In 2:4, Boaz greeted his reapers.
    - Study Boaz' greeting. What does it tell you about him? About his faith?
    - What does this greeting tell you about his relationship with his reapers?
  - In 2:5, Boaz asked his servant in charge about Ruth. Study his question. What, if anything, do you find that seems unusual?
  - In 2:6, 7, the foreman gave Boaz a full report about Ruth.
    - What did the foreman tell Boaz?
    - How did the foreman describe Ruth's conduct in the barley field?
3. In Ruth 2:8-13, the author described Boaz' invitation to Ruth to glean in his fields.
- Read 2:8 several times.
    - How would you describe Boaz' feelings as he gave this invitation?

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- (2). If you were Ruth, how would you feel when you received this invitation?
- (3). Look at the invitation Boaz offered Ruth. Why would he give these specific instructions/invitations?
- b. In 2:9, Boaz gave Ruth yet another gift/instruction.
  - (1). What were his instructions?
  - (2). Think of yourself as one of the other widows gleaning in this field. How would you feel?
- c. In 2:10, Ruth responded to the kindness of Boaz.
  - (1). What did Ruth do?
  - (2). What did these actions mean?
  - (3). What did Ruth say?
  - (4). What do these words tell you about her response to the kindness of Boaz?
- d. In 2:11, Boaz answers Ruth's question from 2:10.
  - (1). What answer did Boaz give?
  - (2). Study the things Boaz said about Ruth. Why would these be important to him?
- e. In 2:12, Boaz sought a blessing from God for Ruth.
  - (1). Boaz petitions God for two separate blessings for Ruth. What is the difference between the two blessings in this verse?
  - (2). What is the significance of the words of Boaz, "...the God of Israel under whose wings you have come to take refuge"?
- f. In 2:13, Ruth responded to the blessing of Boaz.
  - (1). There are two parts to Ruth's response in this verse. Read her first response again. What do you think of when you read it?
  - (2). As you read the second part of Ruth's response, think of yourself in Ruth's place.
    - (a). How would you feel?
    - (b). What would you be thinking?
- 4. In 2:14-16, Boaz extended his friendship to Ruth.
  - a. Read 2:14 several times.
    - (1). If you were Ruth, what would the invitation of Boaz say to you?
    - (2). Observe Ruth's actions in this verse. What does this tell you about her?
  - b. In 2:15, 16, Boaz gave his harvesters instructions concerning Ruth.
    - (1). List each instruction Boaz gave.
    - (2). If you were Ruth, how would you feel as you listened to these instructions?
    - (3). If you were one of the other gleaners, how would you feel listening to these instructions?
- 5. In 2:17-23, Naomi listened to Ruth's report and offered Ruth her advice concerning the gleaning.
  - a. In 2:17, the author described Ruth's gleaning activities on a given day. Read the verse carefully and record each piece of information you find in the verse.
  - b. In 2:18, there appears to be some confusion.
    - (1). Read the verse carefully several times.
    - (2). Describe, in your own words, the author's report of Ruth's activities in this verse.
  - c. In 2:19, Naomi responded to the large amount of grain Ruth had gleaned that day.

## QUESTIONS FOR RUTH LESSON 2

- (1). Naomi asked Ruth two questions. If you were Ruth, how would you feel if you gave the response that she gave?
- (2). In 2:19, Ruth responded to Naomi's questions. If you were Ruth, what would you be thinking as you gave the responses that she gave?
- d. In 2:20, Naomi did three things:
  - (1). Identify the three things Naomi did.
  - (2) Explain, in your own words, the statement Naomi made in this verse.
- e. In 2:21, Ruth responded to Naomi's announcement that Boaz was a relative.
  - (1). Describe Ruth's response.
  - (2). Describe Ruth's feelings as she responded to Naomi's statement.
- f. In 2:22, Naomi responded to Ruth's rehearsal of the statement by Boaz.
  - (1). Compare 2:22 with 2:21 and 2:8.
  - (2). What did you find?
  - (3). What was Naomi trying to do in 2:22?
  - (4). Read Naomi's suggestions to Ruth very carefully.
    - (a). What did Naomi suggest?
    - (b). What was Naomi's major concern in making these suggestions?
    - (c). What does this tell you?
- g. In 2:23, Ruth responded to Naomi's suggestions by actions rather than by words.
  - (1). How would you describe this response?
  - (2). What does this tell you about Ruth?
6. Review chapter two with these questions in mind:
  - a. What does this chapter tell us about Naomi?
  - b. What does this chapter tell us about Ruth?
  - c. What does this chapter tell us about Boaz?
  - d. What does this chapter tell us about the relationship between Ruth and Naomi?
7. Every part of a Biblical historical book reveals something about the nature of God. Reflect on chapter two. What does it reveal about the person and character of God?



## LESSON 2: – RUTH 2:1 – 23

### RUTH GLEANED THE FIELDS OF BOAZ

In our best documents there are four paragraphs in Ruth, chapter two. They are as follows:

2:1-7	Ruth Gleaned in the Field of Boaz
2:8-13	Boaz Invited Ruth to Glean Only in His Fields
2:14-16	Boaz Invited Ruth to be His Table Guest
2:17-23	Ruth Described Her Experience Gleaning

#### Ruth 2:1-7 - Ruth Gleaned in the Field of Boaz

Chapter two begins with the word "and." If you read 1:19-22 and 2:1-7, you will notice that 2:1-7 is a continuance of the story of 1:19-22.

Notice how 2:1 sets the stage for what follows.

*Now Naomi had a relative on her husband's side, from the clan of Elimelech, a man of standing, whose name was Boaz. Ruth 2:1*

It may seem excessive to say both "Naomi had a relative on her husband's side," and also to say, "from the clan of Elimelech." These statements are not redundant. It is possible to be a member of Elimelech's family and not be a kinsmen-redeemer. This is because the brothers of the deceased, childless husband were eligible to carry out this responsibility on behalf of their brother. Other members of the family, however, were not eligible. We will deal more carefully with this issue in another paragraph.

In the verse just quoted, the author informed us that Boaz, "was a man of standing." The Hebrew text speaks of Boaz as "a man of substance." This refers to the character of the man as well as his economic and political situation. In I Chronicles 2:11, Boaz was referred to as a descendant of Hezron. It is highly possible that he was the chief of the Hezrite clan/family that lived in Bethlehem. Whatever the position of Boaz, he was certainly a man of great position and respect in Bethlehem. Some scholars suggest that Boaz was one of the judges. If this is true, it would put a different light on the position of Boaz in the community. This, of course, can not be verified.

The author presents a very informative picture of Ruth in this paragraph.

*And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, "Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor." Naomi said to her, "Go ahead, my daughter." Ruth 2:2*

The author reminds us **again** that Ruth was a Moabitess. This is surprising because relationships between Jews and people from Moab were very poor. It is possible that Ruth came from a royal family in Moab. If this is true, think of what this meant when she made the request of Naomi. We would not be surprised if it had been necessary for Naomi to

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urge or command Ruth to help provide for their daily food, however, Ruth looked for a way to provide for her mother-in-law.

Ruth knew, as did everyone else, that gleaning would be demeaning for a person of royal background. In spite of this humiliation, Ruth was not only willing to do this, but sought the opportunity. This is another piece of information about the character of Ruth.

Gleaning was not a very productive means of sustaining oneself. In the process of cutting grain, gathering it into sheaves to dry and then bringing it to the threshing floor for threshing, stalks and kernels of grain would be left in the field. The right for the poor to glean in the fields was described earlier in the Old Testament.

*When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the alien, the fatherless and the widow, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. Deuteronomy 24:19*

Ruth, both as a former alien and now as a Jewish widow, had a right to glean in the fields. She would be able to gather any sheaves which might be overlooked. Some owners put hindrances in the way of gleaners while others, contrary to Deuteronomy, forbade gleaners altogether. Thus, Ruth qualified her gleaning by saying, "Anyone in whose eyes I find favor."

Notice that Ruth asked permission from Naomi to go and do this laborious task. We might think, "If I am willing to do such hard, demeaning work, Naomi shouldn't mind. I'll just do it." Ruth thought differently. There is both submission and compassion in this picture: submission because Ruth requested permission to do even the most menial kind of work; compassion because Ruth knew how embarrassing it would be for Naomi to do menial work when several years earlier she left Bethlehem as the wife of a wealthy man. At that time she would not have been expected to work at all.

Consider also the fact that Moses, in Deuteronomy 24, used two different names for God. He spoke of "LORD" and "God." The name "LORD" is "Jehovah" and identifies God as the eternal God of justice. The name "God", however, is "Elohim" and identifies God as the Majestic God of Mercy. In view of the fact that Moses was talking about kindness to the fatherless and widow, these designations for God are particularly apt.

There were two ways to glean. Ruth made a deliberate choice as to how she would glean:

- Some gleaners were polite, appreciative and careful to avoid even the appearance of greed.
- Other gleaners would enter the field without asking. They would try to take stalks from the sheaves if no one was looking. They would try to mingle with the harvesters in order to get an even larger portion of the grain.

Ruth, despite the fact that she had once lived in abundance, was one of those in the first group.

Naomi's response was as gracious as Ruth's request was generous. Many women would be eager for their daughter-in-law to do the laborious, demanding tasks. We need to ask ourselves just what Naomi's motive and attitude was in this exchange. The text does



## RUTH GLEANED THE FIELDS OF BOAZ

not speak specifically to this issue. There are some hints which we will observe from time to time. We hope you will have enough information to decide for yourself at the conclusion of the study. My own observations lead me to believe that Naomi was not happy to see Ruth do this, but gave her permission because of their dire need.

The last part of Ruth 2:2 is a picture of the harmony in which Ruth and Naomi lived. Naomi called Ruth "my daughter." Naomi did not look upon Ruth as the wife of her son, but as the daughter that she apparently never had. Naomi did not rule her daughter-in-law, but listened to her desires. She allowed Ruth to help decide how they would survive.

The author continued the story in the following verse:

*So she went out and began to glean in the fields behind the harvesters. As it turned out, she found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelech. Ruth 2:3*

It sounds as though the location of Ruth's gleaning was a matter of chance or accident. It was not. In our text it says "As it turned out." The King James, however, puts it this way, "And her hap (chance) was to light on a part of the field belonging to Boaz." The emphasis in this wording is that it was the result of chance or accident that Ruth was gleaning in the field of Boaz.

The word "happened" or "chance" is qarah" in Hebrew (קָרָה) which literally means "to bring about." It is the result of forces beyond our control causing things to happen when we have no control over them. The emphasis is not on the accidental nature of these things. Someone has said, "Coincidence is God's way of remaining anonymous." I believe that. I also believe this is what the author described in 2:3.

Again in verse three, the author reminds us, as he did in verse one, that Boaz was of the clan/family of Elimelech. As we will see shortly, this is very important information. The fact that the field belonged to Boaz suggests that he was well to do.

In this descriptive verse, the author gives us more than a list of events. Ruth did glean in the field, but it was more than that. Notice that the author says "she went out and began to glean..." The way it is written in the Hebrew suggests that this was an ongoing process. It might be easier to understand if it were written, " she went out and back and out and back." It suggests that she had been doing this faithfully for some time.

The author also wrote, "she... began to glean in the fields **behind the harvesters.**" Though this is the way gleaners were supposed to work, they usually came as close to the harvesters as possible in order to get just that much more grain than they were supposed to get. Ruth, however, knew where she was supposed to work and she worked there. The practice of gleaning was common throughout the Near East. She also stayed behind the reapers so that she would not attract unnecessary attention to herself. This was a real concern among widows who gleaned in order to provide food for themselves because it might result in physical or sexual abuse.

The exchange between Boaz and his harvesters is very significant.

*Just then Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters, "The LORD be with you!" "The LORD bless you!" they called back. Ruth 2:4*

## STANDING ALONE, BUT NEVER LONELY

Boaz greeted his harvesters with a greeting which would be commonplace for one who was both powerful and deeply devout. Notice how Boaz greeted the reapers. He used the name "LORD" or "Jehovah" to identify the God of Israel. As we said earlier, the name "LORD" "Jehovah" was a way to focus attention on Him as the eternal God of Justice. This was a way of wishing them every kindness, from God, that their good service deserved. This greeting would have been warmly received by the reapers.

It is a little surprising that Boaz greeted his workers first. It would normally be the other way around. Some Jewish scholars explain this by saying that Boaz was just returning from mourning the death of his wife. You never greet a mourner, but wait for them to greet you first. If Boaz' wife had died, it would explain this order of greeting. There is, however, no textual evidence that the wife of Boaz had died.

Notice that this verse begins with "Now behold..." In the Hebrew text it is "And behold..." In either case, the wording suggests that the words which follow contain something unusual and they do. It seems highly unusual that a man of Boaz' position would be able to take the time to visit his fields at harvest time. His other responsibilities would be just too demanding to allow for this.

This was a time when there were several women who were widows in the area along with Ruth. In view of this, it is somewhat surprising that Boaz took notice of Ruth.

*Boaz asked the foreman of his harvesters, "Whose young woman is that?" Ruth 2:5*

Again, some would call this a coincidence. Boaz' question was interesting because it was unusual. It was unusual for two reasons:

- Boaz knew every person in town by sight. He was an important person in this little family enclave. He would certainly know all about the coming of Ruth and Naomi. If nothing else would let him know, Ruth's dress would tell him she came from Moab.
- This was unusual that he would even notice that Ruth was present. There were always widows gleaning the fields during harvest time. People tended to ignore them because they had no husband. This was not evidence that they were crude and uncaring. If a man asked questions about a widow, he would immediately be under suspicion concerning the motives behind his concern.

The response of the servant in charge of the reapers gives a clue as to just how responsible he was.

*The foreman replied, "She is the Moabitess who came back from Moab with Naomi. She said, 'Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the harvesters.' She went into the field and has worked steadily from morning till now, except for a short rest in the shelter." Ruth 2:6, 7*

His answer assumes that Boaz knew about the arrival of Ruth and Naomi. Though it may appear that Ruth and Naomi had just arrived, in fact they must have been back in Bethlehem for some time.

## RUTH GLEANED THE FIELDS OF BOAZ

Notice that in his answer the servant also stresses the fact that Ruth came from Moab. It indicates that she was a Moabitess. It was also a way to express shock. No one would be too shocked that Naomi returned. Everyone would be stunned that she brought a Moabitess into Canaan and even more so in Bethlehem. Notice also that the servant made a double reference - Ruth was "the Moabitess who came back from Moab with Naomi." This is one more emphasis on this unusual turn of events.

The servant in charge reported to Boaz the request Ruth made. There are at least two reasons for this:

- He was being a responsible servant - giving his master a detailed report of events. This was nothing more than would be expected of him.
- Ruth made an unusual request. In her petition, Ruth imposed limitations upon herself that though customary, other gleaners tried to avoid. The servant wanted Boaz to know just how unusual this Moabitess was.

The servant in charge also gave Boaz a report of Ruth's activities in the field. The servant's report was very favorable and complete. She went into the field when they started work. She gleaned steadily all day. She took only a short time off to rest in "the shelter." The meaning of the words "the shelter" is obscure. We assume that it means a rough temporary shelter to provide shade from the blazing sun. It was not wise to work all day without taking a brief respite in the shade. This was exactly what Ruth had done.

### Ruth 2:8-13 - Boaz Invited Ruth to Glean Only in His Fields

As we read in the previous paragraph, it may sound as though it were a private conversation. It was not. At least part, if not all of it was spoken where Ruth could hear what was being said about her.

Having received the report from his servant in charge, Boaz spoke directly to Ruth:

*So Boaz said to Ruth, "My daughter, listen to me. Don't go and glean in another field and don't go away from here. Stay here with my servant girls." Ruth 2:8*

Boaz referred to Ruth as "my daughter." He was not indicating that Ruth was a member of his family. "My daughter," when spoken to a younger woman by an older man, was a term of deference and respect. This would tell everyone that he was speaking to Ruth with great respect. It tells us that Boaz was considerably older than Ruth.

The phrase "Listen to me..." was neither sharp nor curt. The Hebrew is worded differently. "Hear me well, my daughter." This seems to be the preferred translation. It is a way of confirming to her the instructions she had overheard him give the servant in charge.

Boaz gave Ruth several separate instructions:

- **Don't go and glean in another field** - This was an instruction to continue working in the field where she had been gleaning. This was an expression of his concern. Fields where the harvesters had completed their work would already be quite well gleaned. She would get much less in these fields than she would in this one.
- **Don't go away from here** - Again, Boaz expressed his concern for Ruth's welfare. If she went to another owner's fields, she might not be welcomed. She would

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certainly not get the amount of grain she was finding here. She would probably be exposed to verbal abuse if not more.

- **Stay here with my servant girls** - The fields in which Ruth was working were not completely gleaned. She would get more grain with less effort for that reason. Working with the servant girls, Ruth would get even more than in the fields of less generous owners. It would be much safer for her to work with his servant girls.
- Boaz continued to give Ruth instructions in verse nine. Notice the continued generous offers he made to her.

*Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the girls. I have told the men not to touch you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled." Ruth 2:9*

There may be a double meaning in this verse which is lost in translation. The Hebrew text is helpful here. It literally says, "Eyes on the field" or "keep your eyes on the field." This can mean two things:

- The most obvious was the instruction to keep an eye on the field so that when the men had finished cutting the grain she could be the first to commence gleaning.
- It is also possible that there is a subtler meaning involved. When someone blessed a benefactor, it was sometimes referred to as a "generous eye" as opposed to an evil eye or a request that God destroy the enemies of the righteous.

One might easily misunderstand what Boaz said, "I have told the men not to **touch** you." A better word for "touch" might be "interfere." It was his way of telling Ruth that the men had been instructed not to interfere with her in any way. They should treat her this way without instruction, but Boaz' specific instruction would further impress on the minds of his reapers that such interference would not be tolerated.

In the last part of the verse there is a great kindness bestowed upon Ruth by Boaz. In or near some of the fields, there were water sources. Most of these were from shallow springs and water courses. The water was not clear and seldom cool. When reapers came to the field, they brought water from the village well and it was much better. The widows were not allowed to take any of this water. As you may remember, women were usually the ones to go to get water. In this case, the workers got the water and Ruth was invited to take some of it. The other widows, of course, were not permitted to do this. Boaz said, so that everyone could hear, that Ruth was welcome to take from this supply as well as any of the reapers could. This would surprise the reapers. It might also disturb the one responsible for bringing this water from Bethlehem.

Everyone in that field knew that Boaz was treating Ruth with unusual kindness. Ruth's response indicates that she, too, was aware of this unusual generosity.

*At this, she bowed down with her face to the ground. She exclaimed, "Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me - a foreigner?" Ruth 2:10*

The Hebrew text contains another piece of information - "she fell on her face." I believe that this was a part of the original text. Ruth's response was in three parts, each of which had symbolic meaning:

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**She fell on her face** - This is an act of reverence. She did not worship Boaz in the sense that we worship God. Her actions were exactly what you see in Joshua 5:14. When Joshua was about to go against Jericho he met "the commander of the army of the LORD." Joshua fell on his face. It was not worship. It was an act of deep respect and deference. It is used in Ruth 2:10 as a symbol of such respect. She was not worshipping Boaz.

**She bowed herself to the ground** - This is one of at least three places where this happened in the Old Testament. In I Samuel 25:23, Abigail bowed herself before David pleading with him to spare her husband Nabal, who had refused to give food for David's army. In II Kings 4:37, Elisha raised the Shunammite widow's son from the dead and she bowed herself before the prophet. In both these illustrations the women bowed in great deference to men of power; they bowed in great respect before men who showed great mercy. That is exactly what Ruth did here.

**Ruth spoke to Boaz** - She said, "Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you noticed me - a foreigner?" Ruth 2:10b Ruth's question was one of humble confusion. She really asked two questions:

- **Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you noticed me?** There were many other widows who gleaned in the same fields. Boaz took special notice of Ruth even though she was not a local person. He knew the others without asking their names, but he bestowed gifts and honor upon Ruth. She could not understand that.
- **Why have I found favor in your eyes that you noticed me - a foreigner?** - Because Ruth was a stranger, a foreigner, she had no rights or privileges in Canaan. She could not own land. She had no legal standing. Because her husband was dead, there was no one designated as family for her. Only the kindnesses commanded in Scriptures for strangers were due to her. These kindnesses are described in Leviticus 19:33-35.

Ruth's confusion was that though she was a stranger without claim or privilege, still Boaz honored her in ways he did not honor widows of his own community and extended family who had gleaned in the same fields with her. All of this was beyond her ability to comprehend.

Boaz clearly explained his generous kindness to Ruth in these terms.

*Boaz replied, "I've been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband - how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before." Ruth 2:11*

Notice how Boaz answered - first he summarized his response. Then, he detailed what he meant by the summary. He indicated that his conclusion was based upon what others had told him. The message of the text is not distorted, but a strong emphasis is lost in the translation from Hebrew to English. Our text says, "I've been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law." The Hebrew is much more dramatic, "I've been told, I've been told..." By repeating the phrase twice, Boaz emphasizes as strongly as possible that he was hearing this from all sides and he has heard all there was to hear about Ruth's kindness, concern and sacrifice on behalf of her mother-in-law, Naomi. The generous

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feelings of Boaz grew out of an awareness of how Ruth treated Naomi since the death of Mahlon. This was astonishing. Mothers-in-law had a way of lording it over their son's wives. The result was that the women almost universally despised their mothers-in-law. These women would rejoice at any misfortune that came to the one woman in the world who mistreated them most - their mother-in-law. Ruth was different. Boaz was aware of this shockingly unique relationship. He was so awed by this that he wanted to do something generous, something very kindly disposed on Ruth's behalf.

Having said this, Boaz went on to elucidate what he had summarized in the previous part of the verse.

He began by saying that Ruth had left her father and mother. Granted, her parents had no responsibility for her, but to leave the area where her parents were would still be very difficult. Add to this the fact that she did this out of no cultural requirement whatsoever. It was clear to Boaz that this was evidence of her sacrificial love for Naomi.

Boaz continued his stunned report. Ruth not only left her parents, she also left her homeland. There was no love lost between Jews and Moabites. When other Moabites heard Ruth was going to Canaan, they would certainly remind her of the ways Jews could show their hatred of Moabites. They would draw a gruesome picture of how she would be mistreated. They would do everything possible to dissuade Ruth from going to what they considered certain humiliation and torture among the despised Jews. Boaz knew that despite the most earnest efforts of Ruth's homeland people, she still put Naomi's welfare ahead of her own comfort and best interests. Naomi was an unusual mother-in-law, but Ruth was equally unique as a daughter-in-law.

Boaz was not finished. The shock of his statement was obvious when he said, "... (you) came to live with a people you did not know before." The tension of living among people you did not know is severe. There is something worse than this. The relationship between Moab and Canaan was as bad as it could be. This would heighten the tension to the breaking point. Add to this the scenario that family and friends would share with her and the tension becomes unthinkable. Again, however, Ruth looked beyond what she might encounter to what she might be able to accomplish for her mother-in-law and this made it all worth while. What a woman of commitment and self-giving!

As Boaz considered this wonderful picture of a person who was not a Jew, one who came from pagan background, he cried out in blessing.

*"May the LORD repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge."  
Ruth 2:12*

The blessing that Boaz requested that God bestow upon Ruth was beautiful. It was composed of two separate parts:

**May the Lord repay you for what you have done.** - Boaz used the name "LORD," which is "Jehovah" in the Hebrew, to identify God in his petition for blessing upon Ruth. The name "Jehovah" was used to stress two qualities of God - He is eternal. The name was also used to identify God in situations where justice was being administered. In ef-

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fect, Boaz was asking the LORD to repay Ruth with the blessings which she so richly deserved. What a request coming from a Jew on behalf of a Moabitess!

**May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel** - The Hebrew text is most interesting. It is stated in a slightly different mode. "The Lord (Jehovah - the eternal God of justice) the God (Elohim - the majestic God of mercy) of Israel will repay your actions in full." The difference between the two is the fact that the English translation takes the form of a request Boaz makes to God. The Hebrew text, on the other hand, is in the form of a promise. In these words of praise and thanksgiving, Boaz has given Ruth the highest possible commendation. This is amazing due to the fact that she came from the despised land of Moab.

Boaz concluded his beautiful tribute with a startling disclosure when he continued his picture of God by saying, **"under whose wings you have come to take refuge."** There have been hints along the way, but this is the first time it has been stated in the text. Ruth left her family and homeland in order to take care of Naomi, but that was only part of the story. Ruth, also, left her family and homeland and the worship of her heathen idols in order to come to Canaan to become a Jew and worship the God of Israel. A half-hearted effort would not do for her. She wanted to become totally immersed in the worship of God. This was only possible as she cut all former religious ties and identified completely with the unique people of God. She knew she would be cut off from family and country for the rest of her life. That, however, would be a small price to pay in order to serve the God of Israel.

Put yourself in Ruth's position for a minute. Think of how you would feel hearing one of the leading men in all Israel saying these beautiful words about you!

Ruth responded to the praise of Boaz in a very interesting way.

*"May I continue to find favor in your eyes, my lord," she said. "You have given me comfort and have spoken kindly to your servant - though I do not have the standing of one of your servant girls." Ruth 2:13*

It was as though Boaz had not spoken his beautiful words of praise. Ruth addressed Boaz as "my lord." The word "lord" in this instance, is "adonai" which comes from a root word which means to rule. Its primary use is as a name for God, but is also used to identify a master or owner. The term was also used, as in this instance, to respectfully address an older man.

Ruth made a request which sounds as though she did not hear his lavish words of praise. She requested that she find favor in his eyes. The word "continue," as found in our text, does not appear in the Hebrew. You will remember that Ruth used these words in 2:2 where it meant that the person, in whose eyes she found favor, would allow her to glean his fields. She was asking that she be allowed to glean his fields as if she had not done it before.

Ruth continued her response to Boaz by responding to his words of praise. She said that he had given her comfort. It was a source of comfort, a release from tension and pressure to know that she would not only be able to glean, but that there would be additional grain available which was not expected; that she could work closest to the servants who

made sheaves out of the cut grain; that she could drink of the best water which the reapers brought to the field. All of these things were a source of comfort; a knowledge that made life look a lot brighter than it had been before.

She continued, "You have spoken kindly to your servant." The Hebrew text is much more forceful. "You have spoken to the heart, (literally upon the heart) of your maid servant." It was a way of saying that his words carried such deep, strong meaning for her that his words overpowered her feelings.

Ruth never forgot her place in this new culture. She apparently had grown up experiencing all the deference and privilege of royalty, but here she had no stature at all, she was a foreigner. Her words were spoken out of astonishment. She told Boaz how his words startled her, especially when she remembered that his servant girls, who had no cultural stature at all, had higher standing in the community than she did, because she was a foreigner, a Moabitess at that!

### **Ruth 2:14-16 - Boaz Invited Ruth to be His Table Guest**

In this brief paragraph, Boaz conducted himself as a gracious host. Notice how the author described his efforts.

*At mealtime, Boaz said to her, "Come over here. Have some bread and dip it in the wine vinegar." When she sat down with the harvesters, he offered her some roasted grain. She ate all she wanted and had some left over. Ruth 2:14*

In the capacity of being a host, he invited Ruth to dine with them. As was true with so much of Jewish life, the words were symbolic. Boaz was doing more than inviting Ruth to eat. He was offering her the hospitality of his household. This invitation gave her privileges and status among the members of his household.

Notice Boaz said, "Come over here and have some bread and dip it in the wine vinegar." This gesture was a symbol of acceptance. In that culture you would never eat with an enemy, one with whom you were not at peace or whom you did not accept. To eat with a person was a sign of your acceptance of him/her. When Boaz invited Ruth to eat, he also was telling her she was accepted.

Observe that at least part of their meal was bread dipped in wine vinegar. This might be eaten at other times, but it was especially common at harvest time. It was very hot. They thought that the vinegar would make it easier for them to endure the heat.

Notice also that the author tells us, "She sat down with the harvesters." Notice that it does not say that she sat down next to Boaz who had befriended her. She sat with the hired help. This is a picture of humility. Ruth was not presumptuous to take the place of honor. She knew her place and was content there.

It was a strong custom that hired reapers and impoverished gleaners never met in the field. This was because it would otherwise be easy for the poor to take advantage of this kindness and take more grain than the law allowed. Gleaners were not to be in a part of the grain field until the grain had been made into sheaves and these stacked in shocks to dry. This kept gleaners from taking too much, as they were prone to do. Keeping gleaners out of a part of the field until the reapers completed their work made it easy to discern if everyone was abiding by the established rules for gleaning. Ruth was invited to dine with



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Boaz and all the reapers. This was most unusual. Women never sat down at a table with the men. The women and children ate after the men had finished. The fact that Ruth was invited to the table would tell everyone that Boaz offered Ruth a very special privilege that no one else enjoyed.

There are some other pieces of information in verse 14. Notice that the text says, "He offered her some roasted or parched grain." This is the only place in the Old Testament where the word "he offered her" or "he handed her" is found. This is symbolic. When there was a guest at the table, the host would offer him/her the very best food at the table. This was a way of honoring the special guest. At the Passover, which we call the Last Supper, Jesus took a morsel and gave it to Judas. It was a way of telling Judas and the 11 that Judas was the honored guest at this feast. This meal in the grain field was not a feast, but a workers' meal. Parched grain was the most elegant thing on the menu. Everyone who participated in the meal would share the parched grain, but only Ruth would receive it from the hand of Boaz. This was the symbol of honor. Add to this, the fact that she received it from the hand of one of the leaders of the community, if not of the whole people of Israel.

The author also described Ruth's response to this honor. "She ate all she wanted and had some left over." This statement indicates that the portion that Boaz gave Ruth was substantial. The size of the food portion was significant. You will remember in Genesis 43:34, that when Joseph served the food for his brothers, he gave five times as much to Benjamin as he did to his other ten brothers. This is an additional sign, to Ruth as well as to the workers, that she was being offered great honor.

As the verse indicates, Ruth left some food that had been served to her. In parts of Europe, even today, good etiquette requires that a little food be left on one's plate to indicate that you have had sufficient. If no food is left, a host will take this to mean that you want more and will serve you again. Ruth understood the customs of the day and observed them well. It is thought by some that she left some in order to take it home to Naomi so that she, too, would have something to eat. We will deal with that possibility a bit later in the study.

In the closing verses of this paragraph, Boaz gave his harvesters specific instructions concerning their treatment of Ruth.

*As she got up to glean, Boaz gave orders to his men, "Even if she gathers among the sheaves, don't embarrass her. Rather, pull out some stalks for her from the bundles and leave them for her to pick up, and don't rebuke her." Ruth 2:15, 16*

It was now clear to Ruth and all the servants of Boaz, that he viewed Ruth differently from all the other gleaners. These men would understand his actions to indicate that he was accepting responsibility for her total care.

In 2:15, the author said, "As she got up to glean." The indication here is that with all the gestures of care given By Boaz, Ruth was still going to glean, to work for her care. She was not going to take advantage of the kindness of Boaz. This was not always the response of the poor and the widows. They often took everything that was offered and then some.

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In verses 14 and 15, there is a series of six instructions that Boaz gave his reapers:

**"Even if she gathers among the sheaves..."** The rules for gleaning required that the gleaners stay away from the sheaves. A gleaner could get more grain around a shock or sheaf than they could in all the surrounding areas. Basically, gleaners were not to take more than two grain stalks at a time. Boaz instructed the reapers to allow her to glean around the sheaves and shocks so that she could get as much grain as possible. This was an unusual command and everyone knew it.

**"Don't embarrass her."** The word embarrass, in Hebrew, is "kalam" (כָּלַם) and means "to wound," "to insult," "to make ashamed" "or blush." This could take several forms:

- They could embarrass her by raising their voices when chiding her for her gleaning practices.
- They could embarrass her by speaking rudely or abusively.
- They could embarrass her by falsely accusing her and demeaning her motives.

Boaz gave a blanket instruction, "Do not embarrass her."

**"Pull out some stalks for her from the bundles"** - Again, Boaz was clearly indicating that Ruth was to receive special, unusual treatment. No other gleaner would be treated so well. These reapers had probably never received such an instruction in all their lives. No one ever did such a generous thing before. Boaz was saying, "She will not get enough grain from simply gleaning. Pull some of the stalks out of the bundles (sheaves) and leave them for her." This would double or triple the amount of grain Ruth would gather in a day.

**"Leave them for her to pick up."** - Jewish people would have been embarrassed to receive the food having done nothing to earn it. Boaz instructed his reapers to pull some stalks of grain from each sheaf and leave them where she could find them. This would preserve her dignity and self respect and at the same time provide for her need. This was a common concern and practice in Israel.

**"Let her glean."** - Unless instructed otherwise, hired reapers would often drive off the gleaners fearing that their master would be unhappy to have them in his field taking his grain. Many land-owners felt this way in spite of the law requiring them to permit gleaning.

**"Don't rebuke her"** - These commands would cause extra work for the reapers. Because most land-owners would not do as Boaz did and because she was a Moabitess, the reapers would certainly be confused and perhaps angry. Boaz was simply saying, "Do not take out your anger and frustration on Ruth. She is a convert to Judaism and deserves our care and respect. I am taking full responsibility for her care."

### 2:17-23 - Ruth Described Her Experience Gleaning

In the course of the story, the author tells us some very important information about Ruth.

*So Ruth gleaned in the field until evening. Then she threshed the barley she had gathered, and it amounted to about an ephah. Ruth 2:17*

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The author gives us more information about Ruth in this verse.

**Ruth gleaned in the field until evening** - Ruth did not shorten her efforts because she had received the generosity of Boaz. A day's work was from sun up to sundown. Ruth spent the entire time gleaning. Others had stopped earlier to go home and separate the stalks and chaff from the grain.

Though it was bulky to carry, widows took their gleanings home to separate the grain from the stalks and chaff. This gave them grain for food, the chaff for the fire when they cooked and the straw for animals and for cooking. Ruth chose not to take advantage of that, though she would have been welcomed to do so. This is one more picture of the generous character of Ruth.

**Ruth's efforts provided an ephah of barley** - Barley was the staple food of the poor. Exodus 16:36 indicates that an omer, one person's food for one day, is one tenth of an ephah. In reality, the ephah of grain Ruth gathered would last the two of them about a week. Some say an ephah was about one half bushel, but it was probably less. This was the reward of only one day's gleaning. There were several more days of barley harvest and then the wheat harvest as well. Ruth's gleaning efforts that day would provide a large portion of the food for the two of them for a week.

Verse 18 continues the story:

*She carried it back to town, and her mother-in-law saw how much she had gathered. Ruth also brought out and gave her what she had left over after she had eaten enough. Ruth 2:18*

The first part of the verse is clear - Ruth brought the fruit of her day's work home to Naomi. It is the second part of the verse that causes confusion. The text speaks of the food that was left over. Two major views are suggested:

- Ruth prepared her evening meal and then gave the balance of her ephah of barley to Naomi.
- Ruth saved the balance of her noon meal and gave that to Naomi along with the ephah of barley she had gleaned in the field of Boaz.

The evidence for this verse is sparse at best. I prefer the second suggestion, but neither position is defensible. There is just no proof.

Naomi's response is recorded in the following verse:

*Her mother-in-law asked her, "Where did you glean today? Where did you work? Blessed be the man who took notice of you!" Then Ruth told her mother-in-law about the one at whose place she had been working. "The name of the man I worked with today is Boaz" she said. Ruth 2:19*

Naomi's response includes two questions and a statement of praise. The content of the response makes it clear that she was perplexed by the large amount of grain Ruth had gleaned. Naomi's shock is quite understandable. Ruth brought home two or three times as much grain as Naomi expected.

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Look at Naomi's first question: "Where did you glean today?" It is as though Naomi said, "Where did you get this, I don't know anyone here who would be that generous." "Where did you work?" is a different question than "Where did you glean today?" The gleaning is self explanatory. "Where did you work?" deals with the place where Ruth separated the grain from the stalks and chaff. In this second question, Naomi was expressing surprise about the size of the harvesting.

Naomi gave a blessing for the kind master who had befriended Ruth. She said, "Blessed be the man who took notice of you!" This is the first of two blessings by Naomi upon Ruth's benefactor. The cause of this first blessing is the fact that this land-owner, whom Naomi did not yet know, actively took knowledge of and did something about the need of Ruth and her mother-in-law, Naomi.

There is disagreement about Ruth's response to Naomi's blessing. It has to do with the intent of Naomi's blessing. There are two major understandings of this response:

- Ruth simply answered Naomi's question by pointing out the man with whom she had worked and told Naomi the man's name was Boaz.
- Ruth was angry because of the insinuations of Naomi about the generous land-owners motive in giving such great gifts. This would also question Ruth's motives.

We can not be certain, but I place more weight with the first option. I do this because the relationship between Ruth and Naomi was one of complete trust and concern. There had been no reason for Naomi's mistrust as the second option suggests.

Remember, Ruth has not yet discovered that Naomi knows Boaz or that he is a very close relative. Ruth first points out the man for Naomi and then gives his name.

The question naturally arises, Where did this take place that Ruth was able to point out Boaz for Naomi? From the context, it would appear that she was in the place where she and Naomi were staying. This could have been in a house owned by Elimelech and left empty when he took his family and went to Moab. It could also be that the two widows were staying in the home of another relative. My impression is that they were staying in a house which belonged to Elimelech prior to his leaving Canaan. In that culture, extended families tended to live close together; even in adjoining houses. If this were true, Boaz could be seen on his roof seeking the cool of the evening. The text is not explicit.

Naomi made two responses to Ruth's disclosure of the name of Boaz.

*"The LORD bless him!" Naomi said to her daughter-in-law. "The LORD has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead." She added, "That man is our close relative; he is one of our kinsman redeemers." Ruth 2:20*

Naomi's first response was in the form of a blessing upon Boaz. In her blessing, Naomi used the name "LORD" "Jehovah" - the eternal God of Justice. This suggests that she was convinced that Boaz clearly deserved the blessing of God for the kindness he extended to them. Naomi wanted Boaz to be as blessed in his giving as they were in receiving.

This is the second blessing that Naomi pronounced upon Boaz. Notice the thinking on which she bases her blessing. Boaz had shown kindness to the living - Ruth and Naomi -

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and to the dead - Elimelech, Mahlon and Chilion. This gives you an insight into their thinking about family. The wife was part of her husband's life. Any kindness done for her was considered a kindness to him because he was responsible for her even though he was dead.

The second part of Naomi's response to Ruth deals with the identity of Boaz. Ruth knew Boaz was a kind, and wealthy land-owner. Ruth did not know that he was a close relative.

In our text Naomi was quoted as saying, "That man is our close relative; he is one of our kinsman-redeemers." The two parts of this quotation are not the same idea repeated twice. They represent two different ideas altogether:

- Close relatives were family and carried responsibilities of mutual support and protection.
- A kinsmen-redeemer carried these responsibilities, but they also carried additional, unique, special responsibilities which were entrusted to no one else. The kinsman or redeemer is "Goel" in Hebrew. It describes several obligations these people were expected to perform. A kinsman was obligated to come to the rescue of the relative. Among Hebrew people it was the nearest living blood relative.
- A kinsman was obligated to avenge his brother's blood. If a wrong was done against one member it was considered done against every member of that clan. The whole clan was obligated to avenge the murder of a relative, but the closest male member of the clan was held responsible to carry out this obligation. All other clan members were obligated to help him.
- A kinsman-redeemer was also obligated to come to the aid of a relative who was forced to sell his property because of his poverty. The basis of this was found in their Scriptures:

*If one of your countrymen becomes poor and sells some of his property, his nearest relative is to come and redeem what his countryman has sold. Leviticus 25:25*

This was very important because the land was a gift of God to them and they were required to hold onto the land at all cost. The kinsman redeemer was the only solution that they could use to solve this problem.

The kinsman-redeemer was also obligated to redeem his relative who because of his debts, had to sell himself into slavery.

*If an alien or a temporary resident among you becomes rich and one of your countrymen becomes poor and sells himself to the alien living among you or to a member of the alien's clan, he retains the right of redemption after he has sold himself. One of his relatives may redeem him: Leviticus 25:47, 48*

- The kinsman must buy back, redeem the relative or the property sold because of poverty.
- Another obligation of the kinsman involved the brother of the deceased, childless husband/brother. This responsibility fell to the man's oldest brother. If he was unable to carry out this obligation then the responsibility passed to the next older

brother. The kinsman-redeemer, though already married, was required to make his dead brother's wife pregnant. It was also permissible to take the deceased brother's wife as his second wife. This was the situation with Judah's son Onan in Genesis 38:8. Er, Judah's eldest son, died childless. Onan was required to take Tamar, Er's wife as his wife. The first male child born by Tamar to Onan, would carry the name of Er. This kept the dead brother's name from dying out. The dying out of a man's name was considered the ultimate shame.

The kinsman-redeeming brother would receive his deceased brother's property and manage it on behalf of the widow. This kept family property and possessions together. It was considered a shame for these to be separated from the family. Upon the death of the kinsman-redeemer, the child he had fathered on behalf of his deceased brother, would inherit the land the kinsman had redeemed.

If a man could not accept the Levirate responsibility, there was a legal procedure to be followed before the next brother accepted that responsibility:

- The brother must declare, in the gate, before the community leaders, his inability to accept this responsibility.
- The widow would remove the brother's shoe to declare the release of his right to receive the dead brother's property.
- The widow would spit in the face of the brother who could/would not accept the Levirate responsibility. This was a drastic humiliation for him in front of the whole community. It severed relationships between himself and the widow. It would probably have repercussions in his relationships with other members of the clan and community.

Ruth would certainly have known about the "kinsman-redeemers" because the custom was widely practiced in that part of the world. This, however, appears to be her first inkling that Boaz, who was probably a judge, was one of these in their family.

Ruth responded to Naomi's information with further data about the offer Boaz made:

*Then Ruth the Moabite said, "He even said to me, 'Stay with my workers until they finish harvesting all my grain.'" Ruth 2:21*

A problem arises which is not quite as evident in the English translation. In 2:21, Ruth quotes the words of Boaz from 2:8. In that verse, Boaz said, "...stay here with my **servant girls**." Ruth's quotation is different: "He even said to me, "Stay with my workers (masculine)." In 2:22, Naomi refers to the same quotation in these words, "It will be good for you, my daughter, to go with **his girls**." How can we explain this difference? First, it should be noted that it would not be safe for Ruth to stay close to the male harvesters. She would probably be the victim of physical and verbal abuse if she did.

Notice, at the beginning of verse 2:21, the author again refers to Ruth as a "Moabite" - she had not officially become a Jew as yet. Ruth was probably quite tentative with her use of the Hebrew language. This may account for the author's use of the term "Moabite." It can be a reference to her incomplete mastery of the language that she used the

## RUTH GLEANED THE FIELDS OF BOAZ

wrong gender. The correction of the error by Naomi is further evidence of this possibility. There is no proof of this position, but it appears reasonable to me.

The author prefaces his quotation of Naomi's response by stating again that Ruth was her daughter-in-law. Observe how Naomi spoke:

*Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, "It will be good for you, my daughter, to go with his girls because in someone else's field you might be harmed." Ruth 2:22*

Naomi's words, in this verse, are those of deep concern for family. We must remember that when Mahlon died, his family had no further responsibility for Ruth's welfare. The author used three things to point out the unusual care and concern of Naomi for Ruth:

- **She said, "It will be good for you..."** Naomi was thinking of what would be good for Ruth, not about ways of sending her away and terminating her own care for her daughter-in-law.
- **Naomi called Ruth, "my daughter."** Most mothers-in-law, in that culture, would never call their son's wife "daughter," especially when the son was dead. It was Naomi's way to assure Ruth that she was as much a part of the family as if she were her own unmarried daughter.
- At the end of the verse, **Naomi said, "You might be harmed,"** if she went to the field of another land-owner. Naomi was deeply concerned about Ruth's physical welfare. This would be a shock to a Jewish reader. In most instances, the mother-in-law would not bother herself over the welfare of her dead son's wife. They did not consider this as callousness. It just was not her responsibility.

Ruth heard Naomi's suggestions and the closing verse of the chapter deals with her use of that advice.

*So Ruth stayed close to the servant girls of Boaz to glean until the barley and wheat harvests were finished. And she lived with her mother-in-law. Ruth 2:23*

Ruth had no further responsibility to do the bidding of her mother-in-law. Mahlon had died. As far as that culture was concerned, she was totally cut loose from her husband's family. Her complete obedience to the advice of Naomi gives one more piece of evidence of the deep relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. This was startling even to the Jews of that day.

### Reflection

There are some observations about the main characters of the book we should consider. These insights give us a good overview of their personality and character that no single incident can afford us.

### Ruth

2:2 - **Good worker** - She sought an opportunity to glean. She was eager to help.

2:7 - **Polite** - She requested permission to glean. Other widows and the poor did not do this.

2:7 - **Disciplined** - She did not quit gleaning early.

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- 2:10 - **Respectful/grateful** - She bowed before Boaz.
- 2:10 - **Humble** - She thought of herself as foreigner when she could have felt she belonged because of her tie with Naomi.
- 2:11 - **Sacrificial** - Her care of Naomi was known to everyone in town.
- 2:12 - **Spiritual** - She wanted to be a Jew and worship God.
- 2:13 - **Not take kindness for granted** - She asked to be able to glean even after Boaz blessed her.
- 2:13 - **Humble** - She acknowledged the servants had more status than she had.
- 2:14 - **Humble** - She sat down with the harvesters - this was the lower end of the table rather than seeking the place of the honored guest at the meal.
- 2:14 - **Polite** - She left food when she was finished.
- 2:14 - **Thoughtful** - She left food to take to Naomi.
- 2:17 - **Good worker** - She did not quit early.
- 2:19 - **Generous** - She gave part of her meal to Naomi.
- 2:19 - **Open** - She let Naomi know exactly what she had gathered.
- 2:23 - **Obedient** - She did exactly what Naomi suggested to her.
- 2:23 - **Congenial** - She could live with her mother-in-law when that was not necessary.

### Boaz

- 2:4 - **Spiritual** - He wished God's blessing on his servants.
- 2:5 - **Concerned** - He wanted to know about Ruth.
- 2:8 - **Generous** - He invited Ruth to glean all his fields.
- 2:9 - **Protective** - He warned the workers not to interfere with Ruth.
- 2:9 - **Generous** - He offered Ruth good water.
- 2:11 - **Grateful** - He appreciated what Ruth did for Naomi.
- 2:12 - **Appreciative** - He requested God's blessing on Ruth.
- 2:14 - **Kind** - He invited Ruth to eat with the workers.
- 2:14 - **Kind** - He gave Ruth the morsel of honor when he could have taken advantage of her.
- 2:15 - **Caring** - He warned the workers not to embarrass Ruth.
- 2:16 - **Provident for others** - He instructed the workers to pull out some stalks of grain from the sheaves for Ruth.

### Naomi

- 2:2 - **Open** - She wanted Ruth to be involved in making the decisions.
- 2:20 - **Spiritual** - She asked God's blessing on Boaz.



## RUTH GLEANED THE FIELDS OF BOAZ

2:22 - **Concerned** - She shared with Ruth what she thought was wise and helpful

### God

God is mentioned six times in this chapter. All six references involved blessings requested by Boaz or Naomi. The import of this fact that one of the characteristics of God is expressed in the blessings He bestowed upon His people. All six references include the name "LORD." This name speaks of God as eternal. In Exodus 3:14, at the burning bush. Moses was looking for a way to avoid what God called him to do. In that discussion, Moses asked God what he should say if the Israelites asked him the name of the God of their fathers. God's answer was interesting.

*God said to Moses, "I am (Jehovah) who I am (Jehovah). This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I am (Jehovah) has sent me to you.'" Exodus 3:14.*

This is an emphasis on the eternity of God.

Repeatedly through the Old Testament the name Jehovah is used in contexts which involve the necessary exercise of divine judgment.

In the opening chapters of Genesis, the name for God is Elohim (the God of mercy) or Jehovah Elohim. In the contexts of judgment - the Fall, the Flood, the Tower of Babel - the name for God immediately changes to "Jehovah."

In Ruth 2:12, where Boaz pronounces a blessing upon Ruth, he referred to God as "The Lord (Jehovah), the God (Elohim) of Israel." This is an interesting picture of God. It is like saying the God of Israel is a merciful judge. What a beautiful picture of God!

The book of Ruth also speaks about God without mentioning His name. The whole thrust of this book deals with the interaction between God and His people. Ruth was obedient to the worship of God and the way of life God urged His people to live. Throughout this chapter, Ruth sought ways to serve her mother-in-law and God blessed her richly through the friendship of Naomi and the kindness of Boaz. God is kind and merciful to those who serve Him. God works through those who serve and obey Him (Naomi and Boaz) to bless and encourage others who serve Him (Ruth.)



## QUESTIONS FOR RUTH LESSON 3

### RUTH 3:1 - 18

#### NAOMI SEEKS A HUSBAND FOR RUTH

1. On the table below, give a title of seven words or less for each paragraph of Ruth, chapter three.

3:1-5	
3:6-13	
3:14-18	

2. In Ruth 3:1-5, Naomi raised the issue of a kinsman-redeemer for Ruth.
- Look carefully at 1:1; 2:1 and 3:1.
    - What observations can you make on the basis of this study?
    - What does this tell you about the makeup of the book of Ruth?
  - Read Ruth 3:1 again.
    - What was Naomi trying to do?
    - What consequences would this have for Naomi?
    - What does this tell you about Naomi?
  - If you have access to a Bible dictionary or Bible encyclopedia, read what it says about a kinsman-redeemer. What did you learn?
  - In 3:2, Naomi asked Ruth a question about the relationship of Boaz to Naomi's family.
    - Why would Naomi ask Ruth such a question when she already knew the answer?
    - Where could Ruth possibly have gathered the information to answer Naomi's question?
    - What was the purpose of Naomi's question?
  - In 3:2, Naomi mentions two words that may need clarification.
    - What is a "threshing floor"?
    - What is involved in "winnowing"? Why was it done?
  - In 3:3, 4, Naomi instructed Ruth to initiate the Levirate law.
    - Using your Bible dictionary, explain the Levirate law?
    - Put yourself into Ruth's position as Naomi gave these instructions. How would you feel?
    - Naomi told Ruth not to let Boaz know she was there until he was finished eating and drinking. Why would she give this instruction?
  - In 3:5, Ruth responded to Naomi's instructions.
    - How did Ruth respond?
    - What does this say about Ruth?
3. In 3:6-13, the author described Ruth's trip to the threshing floor.
- Why would Naomi send Ruth to the threshing floor in order to initiate this process?
  - In 3:7, the author described the way Ruth followed Naomi's instruction.

## STANDING ALONE, BUT NEVER LONELY

- (1). The author described Boaz' situation by saying, "When Boaz had finished eating and drinking and was in good spirits..." What did he mean?
- (2). Why would Boaz "lie down at the far end of the grain pile"?
- (3). What did the author mean when he said, "Ruth approached quietly, uncovered his feet and lay down"?
- c. Read 3:8 carefully.
  - (1). Put yourself in the place of Boaz. How would you feel?
  - (2). What would you think?
- d. In 3:9, both Ruth and Boaz speak.
  - (1). Boaz had seen Ruth and knew all about her. Why would he say, "Who are you?"
  - (2). Ruth answered Boaz, "I am your servant." Both Ruth and Boaz knew she was not his servant. In view of this fact, why would she make such a statement?
  - (3). Ruth also made a request of Boaz, "Spread the corner of your garment over me." What did she mean?
  - (4). Ruth concluded her statement by saying, "Since you are a kinsman-redeemer." What do these words add to her request?
- e. In 3:10, 11, Boaz responded to the request of Ruth.
  - (1). He began his response with a blessing. He said, "The LORD bless you." Why did he say "LORD" rather than "God" or some other name for God?
  - (2). Boaz again referred to Ruth as "my daughter." Why would he do that when she was not his daughter?
  - (3). Boaz also said, "This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier."
    - (a). To what did Boaz refer when he said, "This kindness"?
    - (b). To what did Boaz refer when he said, "That which you showed earlier"?
  - (4). Boaz urged Ruth "Don't be afraid." Why would this admonition be necessary?
  - (5). In these verses, Boaz made a promise to Ruth.
    - (a). What was the promise?
    - (b). What escape did Boaz leave to protect himself in the keeping of this promise?
  - (6). Boaz closed verse 11 by evaluating Ruth's reputation.
    - (a). What was her reputation?
    - (b). In view of what you have studied so far, what would give the city elders such an impression of Ruth?
- f. In 3:12, Boaz explains a situation to Ruth.
  - (1). Study this brief verse carefully.
  - (2). What does Boaz mean, "...I am near of kin, there is a kinsman-redeemer nearer than I"?
  - (3). Study Boaz' presentation of the information in verse 12. What does this tell you about Boaz
  - (4). Naomi grew up in Bethlehem and knew all about everyone. In view of this fact, why would she send Ruth to Boaz when she knew quite well that there was a nearer kinsman-redeemer than he?
- g. In 3:13, Boaz explained the process that must take place.

### QUESTIONS FOR RUTH LESSON 3

- (1). Boaz said it would be cared for in the morning. Certainly Naomi knew the Levirate law. Why would she send Ruth to Boaz at night rather than when the elders met?
  - (2). In this verse, Boaz made a second vow to Ruth.
    - (a). Compare the two vows - 3:13 and 3:11. What observations can you make about the two vows?
    - (b). In view of these verses:
      - [1]. What observations can we make about Boaz?
      - [2]. What observations can we make about the relationship of Boaz with Ruth?
    - (c). What did Boaz mean when he said to Ruth "I vow that as surely as the Lord lives, I will do it"?
  - (3). In this story, Boaz shows real concern for Ruth's welfare and reputation. In view of this, why would he make the very risky suggestion that she "lie down **until the morning**"?
4. In 3:14-18, the author described Ruth's return to Naomi.
- a. In 3:14, Ruth lay down at the feet of Boaz, but got up before dawn to go home. Why would she not go home when she discovered that Boaz was not the nearest kinsman?
  - b. Boaz said, "Don't let it be known that a woman came to the threshing floor."
    - (1). What did Boaz mean by this?
    - (2). Why should it not be known?
    - (3). If it was so wrong for a woman to come to the threshing floor, then why did this righteous man urge Ruth to stay until the morning? Why did Naomi send her there in the first place?
  - c. In 3:15, Boaz filled Ruth's shawl with barley.
    - (1). Why did he do this?
    - (2). What did this mean?
    - (3). After Boaz helped Ruth put the load of barley on her back, the text says, "then he went back to town." Where did Ruth go?
  - d. In 3:16, Naomi asked a question and Ruth answered.
    - (1). Study Naomi's question carefully.
      - (a). What did she really want to know?
      - (b). What does this tell you about Naomi?
    - (2). Study Ruth's answer just as carefully.
      - (a). What difference would this make?
      - (b). What does it tell you about Ruth?
  - e. In 3:17, Ruth continued her report to Naomi.
    - (1). What was the significance of the six measures of barley?
    - (2). Why would Boaz tell her not to return to her mother-in-law empty-handed?
  - f. In 3:18, Naomi gave Ruth advice about how to proceed in view of recent events.
    - (1). What was her advice?
    - (2). What was the basis of this advice?
    - (3). What does that tell you?
5. Review Ruth, chapter three.

## STANDING ALONE, BUT NEVER LONELY

- a. What does it tell you about Ruth?
  - b. What does it tell you about Naomi?
  - c. What does it tell you about Boaz?
6. Review Ruth, chapter three again.
- a. What does this chapter tell you about God?
  - b. In view of what you observed about God in chapters one and two, are there any surprises in your observations about God in chapter three?

## LESSON 3: – RUTH 3:1 – 18

### NAOMI SEEKS A HUSBAND FOR RUTH

#### INTRODUCTION

There are three paragraphs in Ruth, chapter three. I have given them the following titles:

3:1-5	Naomi Instructed Ruth about Kinsman Responsibility
3:6-13	Ruth Went to the Threshing Floor
3:14-18	Ruth Returned to Naomi

#### Ruth 3:1-5 - Naomi Instructed Ruth about Kinsman Responsibility

It does not appear so in our text, but in the Hebrew text, chapters one, two and three begin with the word "and." Like the Gospel of Mark, Ruth is written in such a way that it seems as though each event immediately follows hard upon the heels of the one that preceded it. That is probably not true, but it seems that way. We will see more of this in the remainder of the chapter.

There is a beautiful picture of Naomi in the opening verse of this paragraph.

*One day Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, "My daughter, should not I try to find a home for you, where you will be provided for?" Ruth 3:1*

Though both Naomi and Ruth were in precarious situations, Naomi's situation was far more tenuous than that of Ruth. Though one might not expect Ruth to be able to marry well, at least she had some hope of marrying and being cared for. Naomi had no such hope and she knew it. In spite of this, Naomi was busy thinking about trying to arrange a wedding for Ruth.

This is even more surprising when you consider what effect Ruth's marriage would have on Naomi. At least while Ruth was single, Naomi had her help in scratching out enough food to keep body and soul together. When Ruth got married, Naomi would have nothing. This knowledge did not defer Naomi in any way.

In this verse, Naomi identifies two things that she wants to do for Ruth:

- **Should I not try to find a home for you?** - In her present situation, Ruth had no home to call her own. Ruth was not pushing Naomi to do this. Naomi did it because she wanted Ruth to have a home.
- **Where you will be well provided for** - The two of them had enough food to eat during the harvest season, but Naomi knew that days of scarcity or even hunger were not far off. She was thinking of Ruth's welfare and not her own.

Everything that Naomi did to pursue this goal was another step toward making her own difficult life absolutely impossible. Naomi was a very self-sacrificing individual and it showed.

Obviously, Naomi had been thinking about this issue. Now she had an idea.

*"Is not Boaz, with whose servant girls you have been, a kinsman of ours? Tonight he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor." Ruth 3:2*

Naomi asked a question, but in fact she made a statement. She said,

*"Is not Boaz, with whose servant girls you have been, a kinsman of ours"*  
*Ruth 3:2a*

Naomi was really saying to Ruth, "Boaz, the one with whose servant girls you were, is a kinsman of ours." Naomi knew everyone in Bethlehem; Ruth knew no one. It would make no sense for Naomi to ask Ruth such a question. In English we often make a statement in the form of a question. This is precisely what Naomi was doing.

As we explained earlier, the identification of "kinsman" means more than being a relative. He is one to whom family members can turn in times of difficulty. In this case, Boaz was a relative charged with carrying out the Levirate law - raising up a son on behalf of a deceased, childless brother so as to protect his name from becoming extinct.

The last part of this verse makes it clear that Naomi had been planning a way for Ruth to approach Boaz about his responsibility. Naomi pointed out that Boaz would be winnowing barley on the threshing floor that night.

Before we can deal with Naomi's plans, there are some things that need to be described:

**Threshing floor** - In Canaan, the depth of soil is very shallow. In many places the bedrock was at the surface of the field. They built a stone wall around a 50 to 75 foot circle of the stone floor. The dry sheaves were gathered from the field and laid on the stone floor. An ox was used to pull a heavy wooden sled around in circles on top of these sheaves. This was to separate the grains of wheat or barley from the hulls and stalks. This was done until all the grain was separated from the stalks and hulls. If a farmer had no ox, he would use a flail to separate the grain from the stalks and hulls. A "flail" was a wooden rod about four feet long and 1-1/2 inches thick. Another rod about a cubit (18 inches) long was attached to the longer rod by a length of leather strap. The farmer would beat the sheaves of grain with this flail until all the kernels had been separated from the stalks and hulls. In both cases, this was followed by a process called winnowing.

**Winnowing** - Winnowing consisted of taking a pitchfork or shovel and throwing the grain up into the air. This gave the wind an opportunity to blow the hulls away from the grain kernels. This was done when the wind was high - late afternoon and evening when the winds tended to be higher.

Naomi knew that Boaz would be at the threshing floor to oversee the winnowing and protect his harvest against theft at night. In view of her awareness of Boaz' necessary schedule, Naomi instructed Ruth concerning the initiation of the Levirate law. Ruth was no stranger to the Levirate law, for it was a common practice throughout the area. She would not need to have it explained to her. The practice of the law would vary from place to place. This is what Naomi was explaining in Ruth 3:2b.



## NAOMI SEEKS A HUSBAND FOR RUTH

There are several questions surrounding Naomi's instructions to Ruth. We will deal with each question at the appropriate place in the text.

The first question, concerning Naomi's instructions, has to do with her advice that the Levirate law be initiated privately and in the middle of the night. Why would she make such a suggestion? Civil and legal matters were conducted in the city gate, or the meeting place of the elders if the city had no wall. The agreement to enter into a Levirate relationship involved not only a marriage contract, but also, the sale of the deceased husband's property. This should be done in the presence of the elders as we will see later in this study. Naomi knew this, but instructed Ruth to initiate the contractual marriage privately. The elders, before whom these agreements were to be made, met during the day and occasionally in the evening. Being fully aware of this, why would Naomi instruct Ruth to pursue the agreement in the middle of the night?

The answer to these questions involves some other questions concerning Naomi's instructions. With your indulgence, we will discuss the answers to these questions along with the others that appear later in this chapter.

Naomi, in verse three, gave Ruth detailed instructions about how she should prepare herself and how she should let Boaz know of her desire for him to pursue the Levirate marriage.

*“Wash and perfume yourself, and put on your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing floor, but don't let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, note the place where he is lying. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do.” Ruth 3:3, 4*

Naomi told Ruth to make herself as presentable as possible. She was to wash, perfume herself and put on her best clothing. A question immediately comes to mind. If Naomi and Ruth were destitute enough to qualify for permission to be gleaners, where did they get the perfume? This was a luxury that only the very rich could afford. Ruth was to put on her best clothes. Where was she to get these? The availability of both the perfume and the special clothing gives us some impression of just how wealthy they were before Elimelech and his sons died. Our text speaks of "best clothes." The Hebrew text, however, simply speaks of clothes. The text does not identify the source of the perfume. One might assume that these fineries were left over from more prosperous days.

The text "then go and uncover his feet and lie down," was sometimes translated, "Lie down and cover yourself with his blanket." We must begin our observations of this issue with two statements:

- Western Christians are very uncomfortable dealing with this issue. It is not a part of our culture. For some, there seems to be an air of promiscuity about this issue. This, however, is not true. This was part of the normal course of events in discrete families. I know of a Christian family in Africa where the husband's mother was concerned because her son and his wife had been married for sometime, but did not have any children. The mother assumed that this meant that her son was sterile when they were simply being cautious. This mother approached her son's wife about sending the husband's brother to father a child.

- We must understand that even in our best Hebrew texts there are some problems with this passage. We, therefore, must be very cautious with our conclusions and generous with our judgments. This is a delicate subject. There are some pieces of information we do not have.

To the best of our knowledge, Naomi's instructions were exceptions to the normal process by which they solved this problem. Though it appears we do not know the whole story, it is safe to assume that Naomi was taking some liberties with the system. The fact that she instructed Ruth to initiate the process secretly, in the middle of the night, in itself raises questions. This was not the way the Levirate law was usually initiated.

Ruth, though she came from a totally different culture, responded in a most gracious way.

*"I will do whatever you say," Ruth answered. Ruth 3:5*

Ruth, for some years, had been responsible for her husband's household and gave direction to Orpah and all the servants. Ruth would have given deference to Naomi. As the wife of Mahlon, the heir to his father Elimelech, however, she would be the one in charge of all the women and children in the household. Now that both Elimelech and Mahlon were dead, the rolls were changed again. Ruth was able to move from being the one in charge to being the servant of Naomi. This was an amazing transition and she did it with grace.

### **Ruth 3:6-13 - Ruth Went to the Threshing Floor**

Again, we have difficulty imagining ourselves in the role of either Ruth or Boaz. We must remind ourselves that this was neither an awkward nor an immoral situation in their understanding. It was considered a merciful way to keep the name of a deceased, childless man from becoming extinct. Ruth was doing what was expected of her to protect her husband's good name.

*So she went down to the threshing floor and did everything her mother-in-law told her to do. Ruth 3:6*

The thing that stands out about this verse is the unquestioned obedience of Ruth to every suggestion of Naomi. It had not been long since Ruth was the one in control. Now she could remove herself from that position and do exactly as Naomi suggested. This is total devotion.

Naomi was careful to suggest that Ruth wait until Boaz had finished eating and drinking to approach him. There may be more than one reason Ruth was to wait until Boaz "had finished eating and drinking":

- It would be impolite to intrude upon the serving of a meal to make such a request.
- To make a request such as this in the presence of his men would put undue pressure on both Ruth and Boaz.
- The word "drinking" "shathah" (שָׁתָה) means to drink or imbibe. The word was also used to describe drinking enough to be drunk. The way this sentence is worded, however, could not mean that he was drunk. Notice, the text says that "when he was finished eating and drinking, and was in good spirits." The Hebrew text

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says, "his heart was good" :tov" (טוֹב)" This describes one who has had enough to eat and drink to feel very comfortable. A person is apt to be more agreeable when he/she has eaten/drunk enough to be very comfortable.

Observe how the author described the scene:

*When Boaz had finished eating and drinking and was in good spirits, he went over to lie down at the far end of the grain pile. Ruth approached quietly, uncovered his feet and lay down. Ruth 3:7*

It was not uncommon for thieves to visit the threshing floor, in the middle of the night, during the harvest season. When they did, they would be least likely to be discovered if they approached the pile of grain at the point farthest from where the reapers were sleeping. To guard against such an encounter, the owner often stayed in that position during the night.

In the middle of this verse, the spotlight shifts from Boaz to Ruth. The author suggests that she did four things:

- **She went down to the threshing floor** - This happened in the middle of the night. Ruth took a great risk to her own reputation to carry out the wishes of Naomi. She did it as though there were no risk at all.
- **Ruth approached quietly** - Again, this happened secretly and in the middle of the night. Neither of these conditions was considered common. The reason for this will be dealt with shortly. In part, at least, Ruth's quiet approach had at least two facets:
  - ◇ She did not want the men to know she was there - This would attract attention from them and that was not her intent.
  - ◇ **Naomi had instructed her to do it this way.** She was just carrying out the wishes/suggestions of Naomi, her mother-in-law. Common procedure or not, this was the way Naomi instructed her to do it.
- **She uncovered his feet.** Again, the text raises questions. We must still deal with the question of why Naomi chose to do this quietly and in the middle of the night when it was usually done during the day and before the elders of the village. We will address that shortly. When a person slept out in the open, they needed a "cloak" to keep them warm. The days in Israel are quite warm, but it gets very cold at night. The man's cloak provided the covering they needed. The text says "she uncovered his feet." This was a way of saying that she rearranged his cloak, at his feet, to make room for herself.
- **She lay down** - When a husband and wife slept in the open, they used the husband's cloak as a covering. This was the means Naomi suggested to let Boaz know that he was to perform this responsibility on behalf of his near-relative, Mahlon.

The spotlight of the text shifts back to Boaz again. Notice how the author describes his discovery.

*In the middle of the night something startled the man, and he turned and discovered a woman lying at his feet. Ruth 3:8*

Some people sleep all night in one position. Most of us, however, move around some in our sleep. The text does not suggest this, but we assume that as Boaz moved around in his sleep, he was startled to discover a person very close to him. He could not have been more startled to discover a woman lying at his feet.

In startled semi-alertness, Boaz blurted out,

*"Who are you?" he asked. "I am your servant Ruth," she said. "Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a kinsman-redeemer." Ruth 3:9*

Apparently, it was so dark that Boaz could not discern who it was that slept at his feet. Thus he risked speaking to discover just who this was. Put yourself in the place of Boaz. This was one of the leading men in all Judah. According to some scholars, he was one of the judges. He had a reputation as a most righteous man. Suddenly here he is in a public place with a woman, not his wife, sleeping under the edge of his cloak. People have a propensity to believe the worst. Imagine what people would think if any one of the reapers woke up to see this situation! Imagine how Boaz would stammer trying to explain how this woman happened to be there. Just who would believe that he had not arranged for her to be with him when he had been so kind to her in the threshing field?

Ruth answered his question directly and honestly - "I am your servant Ruth." Notice, she referred to herself as "your servant." I detect two pieces of information in this statement.

- "Your servant" was the way a young person respectfully identified him/herself to a much older individual.
- I also discern that Ruth thought of herself as a servant. She could take the servant position without being diminished by that action.

Ruth, then, turned her attention to the purpose for which she had come to the threshing floor. She said, "Spread the corner of your garment over me..." The word "garment or robe" is "kanaph" (כַּנָּף) and can mean garment (cloak), but it can also be used to describe a wing. During the mating season, some birds will shield each other with their wings. As a metaphor of this, the word was often used to describe marriage.

Note also that where our text says "spread the corner of your garment **over me**," our better Hebrew texts read, "You shall spread your garment over **your handmaid**." Even in her attempts to deal with her mother-in-law's instructions, Ruth viewed herself as a servant. What a lady!

Ruth immediately clarified the basis for her actions at this point. She said, "Since you are a kinsman-redeemer." In these words, she accomplished two things:

- She made her own motives abundantly clear. This was not an off-color design on her part. Her appearance in the middle of the night would certainly raise questions. This statement would put those questions to rest.
- This was an official announcement to Boaz that Ruth wanted him to carry out his responsibility as a kinsman-redeemer in terms of the Levirate law. Though her

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words were few, there was absolutely no doubt about her purpose or intent. Ruth called upon Boaz to save her dead husband's name from extinction by fathering a child on his behalf.

Again the spotlight shifts back to Boaz. His response probably included a measure of shock and consternation, even after Ruth gave her explanation.

*"The LORD bless you, my daughter," he replied. "This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier: you have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor. And now, my daughter, don't be afraid. I will do for you all you ask. All my fellow townsmen know that you are a woman of noble character." Ruth 3:10, 11*

Boaz began his response to Ruth's request with a blessing. Observe that Boaz appealed to Jehovah - the eternal God of justice, to bless her. This was a way of praying, "God, Ruth deserves to be blessed." This was another piece of information concerning the respect in which Boaz held Ruth.

Again, Boaz identified Ruth with the words, "my daughter." We must observe these are the words an elderly man would use to identify a woman much younger than himself. On the other hand we must also acknowledge the fact that Boaz was clearly old enough to be her father or even her grandfather.

Boaz was moved to bless Ruth because of what she had done. He said, "This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier." Let me identify the kindnesses of which Boaz spoke:

- "this kindness" - Ruth's approach to Boaz, an older man, to carry out the Levirate law of redeemer, rather than seeking out a younger man was a shocking development. In that time, they thought a woman would prefer a poor young man to a rich old man. This was the reason Boaz spoke of this choice as a special kindness.
- "That (kindness) which you showed earlier." Boaz was referring to the way Ruth accepted the role of an impoverished widow and gleaned in the harvest fields to get food for herself and her Jewish mother-in-law.

Boaz went on to explain what he meant by the assertion about the greatness of this kindness. He said, "You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor." He knew that a person had more than one option. She could approach an old man, like Boaz, so as to preserve the name of her deceased husband. She could approach a much younger man, who was a relative, in order to preserve her husband's name. This would allow her to both preserve her husband's name and still have a strong, young husband. Similarly, she could seek out a young man who was rich and not worry about her husband's name. In fact preserving her husband's name was far more important than her own security and comfort.

In verse eleven, having pronounced his blessing on Ruth, Boaz described for Ruth what he was prepared to do on her behalf. He began by referring to her a second time as "my daughter," and then urging her not to be afraid. The word "afraid" was "yare" (יָרֵא) and was a primary root word which can mean to revere, but was more often used to de-

scribe frightening circumstances. Boaz knew that he had to tell Ruth some things that might prove frightening to her.

Boaz continued his response to Ruth's request by giving a promise in the form of an unofficial oath. He had signed no paper, but his promise, without reservations, required that he keep his word no matter how costly it may prove to be. This promise was complete - he promised to do everything Ruth requested.

In the last portion of this sentence, in the Hebrew text, Boaz gave his reason for giving such a blanket promise - "all my fellow townsmen (lit. people of the gate - elders) know that you are a woman of noble character." This request might otherwise cause a disturbance for two reasons:

- **Ruth came from Moab** - people from Moab were considered a lower caliber, as well as pagan.
- **The age of Boaz** - as an elder/judge, was against his participation in such an agreement as this. People might not understand such an elderly man entering into this covenant with such a young woman. It could call into question his ability to be an example in the community.

Boaz said that Ruth's reputation as a person of noble standing, despite her national origin, was so substantial that the people would accept the covenant they made because of their respect for her as an outstanding person and their respect for him as a leader in the community and an example of holy living in the community.

Having shared the good news with Ruth, Boaz now turned to the announcement that was less exciting.

*"Although it is true that I am near of kin, there is a kinsman-redeemer nearer than I." Ruth 3:12*

Observe the delicate way in which Boaz presented this information:

- He gave the good news first, before making the more distressing announcement.
- He was very positive in his presentation. Remember that all of this took place in the middle of the night at the threshing floor. This was a situation that would appear to be compromising for him in the eyes of the people who tend to think the worst. Nevertheless, he took the time and care to present the information in the best possible way.

In this verse, Boaz presented two pieces of information:

**"It is true that I am a near kinsman"** - He was definitely a near kinsman, one who could keep the promise he made to Ruth.

**"There is a kinsman-redeemer nearer than I"** - The Levirate law regarding Kinsman-redeemers applied to everyone in the family who was in that category. Boaz was informing Ruth that there was a definite pecking order of kinsman-redeemers which must be observed without exception. The unfortunate message Boaz had to share was that there was one relative who was a nearer kinsman than he was. There was absolutely no way Boaz could carry out that responsibility unless the nearer-kinsman would/could not accept the

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responsibility. Practically, only financial hardship would allow a kinsman to refuse his responsibility. If he refused for any other reason, the widow would publicly humiliate him so badly that he would lose respect in the community and no one would have anything to do with him. Often, he could not survive such ostracism.

Questions arise. How could it become a financial hardship on the kinsman to fulfill the Levirate law? The child would not be required to repay the kinsman. The child born of such a union would carry the name of the deceased, childless husband, but the child would share in the inheritance of the kinsman who was his physical father. If the kinsman's estate was too small to divide appropriately among his natural children as well as the Levirate child, then his carrying out this responsibility could jeopardize the future of his own children. Under these circumstances, he would be shamed if he accepted the responsibility anyway.

A second, more serious question arises. Why would Naomi send Ruth to Boaz when she already knew that he was **not** the nearest kinsman-redeemer? It is naive to think that Naomi did not know the stipulations of the law. It is just as naive to think Naomi was misinformed about the exact order of kinsman-redeemer responsibility in Elimelech's family. This is the question we have been postponing until later in the chapter. This is that later time. The question of why Naomi chose the middle of the night. Why did Naomi choose the threshing floor instead of the city gate where the elders met regularly? Both answers hinge on the answer to this question. First, the text does **not** deal specifically with this issue. This means that we need to be generous in our thinking concerning positions which differ from our own on this matter. Second, the fact that it seems naive to think Naomi did not know better forces us to question whether she had another agenda in mind. Again, the text is silent, but it appears that she did. Though the order of Levirate responsibility was clearly defined, it appears that Naomi must have decided that she wanted Boaz to carry out that responsibility, rather than the nearest kinsman. Again, this is **not** a provable fact, but it seems plausible.

If this is the case, then we must ask, Why would Naomi prefer Boaz to the nearer kinsman? There could be several reasons:

- It could be, and probably was true, that Boaz was more financially fixed than the nearer kinsman. This would mean that Naomi had a desire for Ruth to have a more lucrative future than she had at this point.
- It could be that Naomi knew that Boaz would be more understanding with Ruth than the nearer kinsman would be. This would be Naomi's concern for Ruth's enjoyment of life.

Whatever the reason, some things seem certain:

- Naomi's choices were intentional. She knew better than to make these suggestions.
- Having done this intentionally, we can safely assume Naomi wanted to provide the very best possible future for Ruth that she could, even at the expense of altering the Levirate law.

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This would be mind-boggling for the people of Bethlehem. This kind of concern was just not common between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. It says something very special about both ladies.

In the final verse of this paragraph, Boaz instructed Ruth concerning what she should do next.

*“Stay here for the night, and in the morning if he wants to redeem, good; let him redeem. But if he is not willing, I vow that, as surely as the LORD lives, I will do it. Lie down here until morning.” Ruth 3:13*

The almost universal response to this statement by Boaz - "stay here for the night" - is confusion and disbelief. Why would he tell her to do such a thing? Ruth's trip to the threshing floor in the middle of the night involves severe risks for her reputation in this tiny, close-knit community. Let one person see her and her standing in the community could be ruined for life. Throughout this story, Boaz expressed deep concern for Ruth as well as her reputation. Why would he give her this instruction which would prolong the risk?

The suggestions are diverse. Some say he had an immoral relationship with Ruth that night. The text always presents Boaz as a righteous man. This reputation does not fit that kind of activity. The text does not speak to this issue one way or another. We need to approach it with great care.

Boaz then outlined what would take place the following day. He started by saying, "In the morning, if he wants to redeem you, good" This portion is interpreted in two ways:

- It will be good if the nearer kinsman is willing to redeem you.
- If the nearer kinsman, named "tov" which means "good," will redeem you, then let him do that.

One interpretation evaluates the scenario as "good," while the other gives the name of the nearer-kinsman. It is not possible to tell from the text which of these was intended. The first suggestion, however, is my preference.

Boaz continued to explain the possibilities so as to assure Ruth. The next sentence of the text begins with the word "but." This suggests a coming contrast. The contrast is plain: First, Boaz described the picture if the nearer kinsman chose to redeem Ruth. Then, after the word "but," Boaz described the series of events if the nearer kinsman refused to redeem Ruth. The statement of Boaz is an "if...then" picture. **If** the nearer kinsman refused to redeem, **then** "I vow that, as surely as the Lord lives, I will do it." Notice, in verse eleven, Boaz said, "I will do for you all you ask." In verse thirteen, his statement was put more forcefully. It is plainly stated as a vow. This meant it categorically could not be recanted. Boaz also involved God in his vow. He identified God as "LORD" "Jehovah" the eternal God. As surely as the eternal God lives, who always was and always will be, just as surely, I will redeem you." It would be difficult to make an oath more binding than this. In effect Boaz said, "The eternal God must cease being before I go back on this oath."



Boaz concluded his oath by instructing Ruth to lie there until morning. Again the question arises, why would he do such a risky thing? We will address this question again, in the next paragraph of the text.

### **Ruth 3:14-18 - Ruth Returned to Naomi**

The paragraph begins with Ruth again doing exactly as she had been instructed. Notice what the author said,

*So she lay at his feet until morning, but got up before anyone could be recognized; and he said, "Don't let it be known that a woman came to the threshing floor."*

*Ruth 3:14*

We should point out that the text is specific, "she lay **at his feet** until morning." The wording of this statement suggests that Ruth slept near him, but not with him. This is contrary to the thinking of those who believe that Boaz had an illicit relationship with Ruth that night.

The author continued the description, saying, "But (she) got up before anyone could be recognized." There is a time before dawn when you can make out the form of one moving, but it is still too dark to be able to discern whom it might be. It was at this time that Ruth got up. This is another instance when Boaz was doing his best to protect the reputation of Ruth.

One possible reason Boaz told Ruth to lie down until morning has to do with how it might appear. If someone saw her returning from the threshing floor in the middle of the night, they would consider only one, unfortunate reason for her being there. If she waits until morning to return, then there is at least one more possibility for her presence there. We will deal with that momentarily.

The words of Boaz gave a hint of what people might think if they saw Ruth. "Don't let it be known that a woman came to the threshing floor." True or not, people would assume that her purposes in coming to the threshing floor at night were immoral at best. Most of the men who stayed at the threshing floor during the harvest season were married men. It would not only cast aspersions on Ruth, but on them as well. Boaz wanted to prevent this. Another question forces its way into our minds. If it was so bad for a woman to come to the threshing floor, then why would Naomi send Ruth there in the first place? The text does not speak to these questions. It appears to be within the realm of reason to believe that Naomi knew who the nearer kinsman-redeemer was. It also appears that she was not happy with having this nearer-redeemer carry out the Levirate law. If these assumptions are true, then it would follow that she was trying to bypass his participation in the Levirate responsibility and have Boaz carry it out because he was far more desirable as a redeemer and husband for Ruth than the other man. This is pure speculation and cannot be verified.

He had one more idea about how to protect the reputation of Ruth. Notice how the author reports the next thing Boaz did.

*He also said, "Bring me the shawl you are wearing and hold it out." When she did so, he poured into it six measures of barley and put it on her. Then he went back to town. Ruth 3:15*

Women wore a shawl, a rectangular cloth which was often used to carry cumbersome loads. Boaz asked Ruth to remove this shawl so that he could put grain into it. Questions arise out of this verse. Our text says that Boaz poured six measures of grain into Ruth's shawl. A woman's shawl would not hold six measures of grain. If the shawl did hold that much grain, a woman could not carry it. The Hebrew text says, "He (Boaz) measured six 'sowrah' (שְׁעוֹרָה) 'grains.'" It does not make sense to say that Boaz measured out six grains of barley and sent them home with Ruth to Naomi. Ultimately, we must say we cannot identify the exact size of the measure of grain Boaz measured for Ruth. My guess is that he filled the shawl with perhaps one fourth to one half a bushel of barley.

If Ruth were seen carrying a large amount of grain home from the threshing floor early in the morning, some might get the wrong impression, but others might think that she had just gotten an early start. It appears that Boaz was counting on this impression.

The author concludes the verse saying, "Then he went back to town." If Boaz went back to town, what did Ruth do? The preponderance of translations, including most Hebrew texts, the vulgate (a Latin version), and the Septuagint (a Greek translation of the Old Testament), all read "**she** went back to town." I believe this is the proper understanding of the text.

Our attention is now focused on the home where Naomi and Ruth were staying.

*When Ruth came to her mother-in-law, Naomi asked, "How did it go, my daughter?" Then she told her everything Boaz had done for her... Ruth 3:16*

Notice that the text does not say Ruth went to a house. It does say she went into the city. Apparently they stayed in a house in the city. There is no indication about whether they stayed with family members or lived in a house Naomi's husband owned before they left and went to Moab. My guess is that it was her own home.

The author told us that when Ruth arrived, Naomi said to her, "How did it go, my daughter?" The Hebrew text, at this point, may sound strange, but it is very insightful. It says, literally, "Who are you, my daughter?" There are at least two ideas about the meaning of Naomi's question:

- It is possible that it was still dark and Naomi could not tell who had come to her door.
- It is more possible that Naomi knew it was Ruth, but wondered if she was now single or married. This may sound strange to us, but it would have been well understood in that culture.

The author summarized the events and conversation from the previous night at the threshing floor in these words, "Then she told her everything Boaz had done for her." You get another glimpse into the life of Ruth in this sentence. There is a fresh openness about her that is attractive. She was genuine. She had nothing to hide. She was excited and rehearsed every detail of that experience for Naomi. It sounds like a little girl excited about winning a race and who had to tell her mother every tiny detail at least once.

Ruth continued her report to Naomi in these words.

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*and added, "He gave me these six measures of barley saying, 'Don't go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed.'" Ruth 3:17*

If you look carefully at what is reported about Ruth's conversation with Boaz and compare that with her report to Naomi, you will note that they are not identical. There is, for instance, no record that Boaz said, "Don't go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed." This does not make Ruth's report false. It could have been said, but not recorded. She accurately reported the conversation about the six measures of barley and had the grain to show for it.

In the closing verse of this paragraph, the author shifts our attention to Naomi's response to Ruth's report.

*Then Naomi said, "Wait, my daughter, until you find out what happens. For the man will not rest until the matter is settled today." Ruth 3:18*

Naomi advised Ruth to wait. Ruth had done everything she could do. Notice that Naomi again refers to Ruth as "my daughter." This is more a term of endearment than a way for an older woman to address a younger one. In the Hebrew text, it is a bit more practical. "Sit patiently, my daughter, until you know how the matter will turn out." It is very difficult to sit patiently unless one is able to trust. Naomi's suggestion was based on her impression of Boaz. She knew that he had given his word in an oath and it was as good as done and that as promptly as possible. The reputation of Boaz was vivid. "The man will not rest until the matter is settled **today**." To be thought of in this way, by people who know you very well, is a marvelous tribute.

### Review

As in previous chapters, we want to see what this chapter tells us about God. The name "LORD" "Jehovah" appears only twice in this chapter, both times used by Boaz. In the first use of the name, 3:10, Boaz implored the blessing of God upon Ruth for her willingness to seek an older man rather than a younger one as most would have done. The second occurrence of the name is in 3:13, where Boaz used "LORD" as a way to identify the dependability of his vow. These two statements by Boaz emphasize information about God:

- God (Jehovah) wants to bless His people 3:10
- God (Jehovah) is eternal - God lives and keeps on living. 3:13

Most of this chapter deals with the attempt to carry out the Levirate responsibility. God, however, is mentioned twice. Both references are the words of Boaz. In the two passages, Boaz refers to God as "LORD" "Jehovah" - the eternal God of judgment. He stressed the fact that God is both kind and eternal.

Both emphases are found in chapter two. There are many other emphases in chapter two beside these two that do not appear in chapter three.

### Ruth

Ruth is prominent in every chapter, but Boaz figures more prominently in chapter three than Ruth does. These are some of the things that the chapter says about Ruth:

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3:5 **Obedient** - She agreed to do just what Naomi told her to do.

3:9 **Humble** - She saw herself as a servant.

3:11 **Noble** - Boaz said she had a noble character and all the leaders knew it.

3:17 **Open** - She told Naomi everything that happened.

### Naomi

The text gives us some helpful glimpses of this noble mother-in-law.

3:1 **Concern** - She wanted to arrange a marriage for Ruth.

3:2 **Industrious** - She was searching for ways to provide for Ruth's care.

3:3 **Helpful** - She coached Ruth about how to initiate the request for fulfillment of the Levirate responsibility.

3:18 **Helpful** - She told Ruth how to handle the situation when it could be costly to herself.

### Boaz

3:10 **Spiritual** - He wished God's blessing on Ruth.

3:10 **Appreciative** - He appreciated Ruth's self-sacrificing choice.

3:11 **Dependable** - He gave his word to help Ruth. He did not change his word.

3:12 **Honest** - He admitted that he was not the nearest kinsman-redeemer.

3:14 **Concerned** - He protected Ruth's character and reputation.

3:15 **Generous** - He gave Ruth grain to take home.

3:15 **Generous** - He gave Ruth additional opportunities to glean in his fields.

These reviews should not be construed to mean that Ruth, Naomi and Boaz were perfect. They were not. The reviews do spell-out some of the characteristics of these people.

The book does not seek to give a complete picture of the characteristics of the three. The book gives us a glimpse into a specific segment of the lives of these people, complete with a description of what each person was like.

## QUESTIONS FOR RUTH LESSON 4

### RUTH 4:1 - 22

#### BOAZ MARRIES RUTH

1. In our best documents of Ruth, chapter four, there are four paragraphs. On the table below write a title of seven words or less for each paragraph.

4:1-6	
4:7-12	
4:13-17	
4:18-22	

2. In Ruth 4:1-6, Boaz sought to provide kinsman relief for Naomi and Ruth.
- In 4:1, Boaz went to the town gate. What explanation can you suggest as the reason he had to go there?
  - In 4:2, why did Boaz take ten elders to participate in this experience?
  - In 4:3, the author quotes Boaz as saying that Naomi was selling some land. Why would she be doing this? What did you learn from this?
  - Boaz said, in 4:4, "I thought I should bring the matter to your (the kinsman-redeemer's) attention..." Why did he feel he should do that?
  - In 4:3, Boaz spoke of Elimelech as "our brother." What did he mean by that remark?
  - In 4:3, 4, Boaz spoke of "buying" the land and also of "redeeming" the land.
    - What difference can you find between the two statements?
    - Why was Boaz so concerned about redeeming the land?
  - In 4:5, Boaz seemed to change the issue at hand.
    - Compare Boaz' statement in 4:3, 4, with that in 4:5.
    - What issue was Boaz discussing in each passage?
    - What difference, if any, does this make?
  - In 4:5, Boaz talked about maintaining "the name of the dead with his property."
    - What did he mean?
    - Why was that important?
  - In 4:5, the author reminds us, once again, that Ruth was a Moabitess. Why was this so important?
  - In 4:4, the kinsman-redeemer, spoke of the land saying, "I will redeem it." In 4:6, however, he changed his mind and said, "I cannot do it."
    - What was responsible for his change of mind?
    - From the texts involved, what can you determine concerning his motive?
    - What difference would this make?
  - In 4:5, Boaz reminded the kinsman-redeemer that when he bought the land, "You acquire the dead man's widow." The kinsman-redeemer was a Jew and knew the law very well. Why would Boaz have to remind him of this?
3. In Ruth 4:7-12, Boaz purchased the land and secured Ruth as his wife.

## STANDING ALONE, BUT NEVER LONELY

- a. Ruth 4:7 explains an ancient Jewish tradition. What does this tell you about the recipients of this book?
  - b. The author said, "Now in earlier times..." What does this tell you about the times in which this book was written?
  - c. In 4:8, the kinsman-redeemer told Boaz, "Buy it yourself." Why would he have to do this?
  - d. In 4:9, 10, Boaz announced that the ten elders and the crowd who were present were "witnesses" of his action. The ten Elders were all the witnesses that Boaz needed. What could be added by the presence and witness of the visitors "in the gate"?
  - e. In 4:9, 10, Boaz talked about his efforts to make sure the man's name did not disappear. Millions of people have died and their names disappeared. Why was this one so different?
  - f. In 4:9, 10, as Boaz announced that he was buying the land and taking Ruth as his wife, he made two stipulations:
    - (1). What were the stipulations?
    - (2). What difference would this make?
  - g. When the legal arrangements of the sale were completed, the people "in the gate" wished blessings upon Boaz:
    - (1). What were their blessings?
    - (2). What difference would these blessings make in the life of Boaz?
    - (3). What blessing did these people seek for Boaz when they compared his wife with Rachel and Leah?
    - (4). What were they saying when they requested that his family be like that of Perez?
4. In Ruth 4:13-17, Ruth gave birth to Obed.
- a. In 4:13, The author mentions, again, that Ruth became Boaz' wife. Why would this be so significant?
  - b. In 4:13, they ascribed Ruth's conception to God's enabling.
    - (1). What does this tell you about God?
    - (2). What does this tell you about the author's understanding of God?
  - c. In 4:14, the village women praised God and ascribed to Him the fact that He did not leave Naomi without a kinsman-redeemer.
    - (1). In view of who Boaz was and what he had done, what did the women mean by this statement?
    - (2). In view of the scriptural instructions against pride, how should we understand their desire that Obed "become famous throughout Israel"?
  - d. In 4:15, they continued to describe their prayer to God concerning Boaz' actions on behalf of Ruth. Why would the women make such a petition?
  - e. In 4:15, the women made some startling statements about Ruth. Read the verse carefully.
    - (1). What did the women say about Ruth?
    - (2). What did they mean by these statements?
  - f. In 4:16, the author made some remarks about Naomi that seem somewhat casual.
    - (1). What did he say about her?

## QUESTIONS FOR RUTH LESSON 4

- (2). What did he mean by these statements?
- (3). If you were Naomi, how would you feel about this situation? What would go through your mind as you performed these duties? How would you see yourself?
- g. In 4:17, there are three sentences.
  - (1). How do these sentences relate to each other?
  - (2). In this verse, the village women said, "Naomi has a son." Everyone knew that this was Ruth's son. Why would they say the boy was Naomi's son?
  - (3). In the second sentence, it says, "They named him Obed."
    - (a). Who is they?
    - (b). What problem, if any, do you see in this quotation? Why?
  - (4). The author said, "He was the father of Jesse, the father of David."
    - (a). What is the importance of this sentence in the paragraph?
    - (b). Beyond the facts relating to the lineage, what was the author trying to tell us?
- 5. In Ruth 4:18-22, the author identified the lineage of David beginning with Perez.
  - a. Why would the author use the lineage of David's as the ending of the book of Ruth?
  - b. In 4:18, the author begins with Perez. He was the son of Judah. Why would the author begin with the lineage of Perez rather than Judah?
  - c. In the second part of 4:18, the author indicated that Perez was the father of Hezron."
    - (1). In a Bible Dictionary, Bible Encyclopedia or Concordance, look up all the information you can about Perez and Hezron.
    - (2). What did you find?
  - d. In 4:18, the author indicated that Hezron was the father of Ram. Often a lineage is traced through the eldest son of the family.
    - (1). Is that true in this instance?
    - (2). Why?
  - e. In 4:19, the author also indicated that Ram was the father of Amminadab. Look in the Bible Dictionary, a Bible Encyclopedia or Concordance for more information about Amminidab. What did you learn?
  - f. In 4:20, we learn that Amminidab was the father of Nahshon. Look in the three references previously mentioned to find information about Nahshon.
    - (1). What did you learn?
    - (2). What difference does this make?
  - g. In 4:20, the author tells us that Nahshon was the father of Salmon. Again, look at your Bible Dictionary, Bible Encyclopedia and Concordance for information about Salmon.
    - (1). Who was Salmon?
    - (2). How does this information help us understand the book of Ruth?
  - h. In 4:21, you will discover that Salmon was the father of Boaz. Turn to your reference books again to learn what you can about Boaz.
    - (1). What position did Boaz hold in the life of the community?
    - (2). What did you learn about Boaz otherwise?
  - i. In 4:21, we are reminded that Boaz was the father of Obed.

## STANDING ALONE, BUT NEVER LONELY

- (1). What can you learn from the Bible Dictionary and Concordance about Obed?
- (2). Having previously discussed the Levirate law and its purpose, why does our author now refer to Obed as the son of Boaz?
- (3). If Obed's mother, Ruth, was a Moabitess, can we consider him to be Jewish?
- j. In 4:21, the author states that Obed was the father of Jesse. There is a considerable amount of information about him in your reference books. How does the information about Jesse impact our understanding of the book of Ruth?
- k. In 4:21, we are reminded that Jesse was the father of David. Read about David in your reference books.
  - (1). In what way does this information strengthen our understanding of the book of Ruth?
  - (2). Study 4:18-22 again. What reasons can you think of for the author to stop the lineage with David? Why didn't he continue with Solomon and the other kings?
- l. In a story about a Moabitess named Ruth, why would the author conclude the book with a listing of the genealogy of David.
6. Review chapter four again.
  - a. What did you learn about Ruth?
  - b. What did you learn about Naomi?
  - c. What did you learn about Boaz?
  - d. What did you learn about God?
7. Now review the whole book of Ruth.
  - a. What did you learn about Ruth?
  - b. In what way has Naomi taken on more personality for you through this study?
  - c. How has Boaz "come to life" for you as a result of this study?
  - d. Review your discoveries about God from each chapter. Aside from the narrative information concerning the characters in this book, it gives us some major insights into the person and character of God. What did you learn about God?
8. Each book of the Bible has a single message to share with us. Identify the one message God has shared with you through the book of Ruth.
9. If you were the author of the book which we now call "Ruth," what title would you give the book?



## LESSON 4: – RUTH 4:1 – 22

### BOAZ MARRIES RUTH

There are four paragraphs in the best documents of Ruth, chapter four. I have summarized them as follows:

4:1-6	Boaz Confronted Relative about Levirate Law
4:7-12	Boaz Claimed Ruth as His Wife
4:13-17	Ruth Bore Obed; Naomi Became His Nurse
4:18-22	The Lineage from Perez to David

#### **Ruth 4:1-6 - Boaz Confronted Relative about Levirate Law**

As you look at Ruth 4:1, you will notice that the sentence begins with the word "meanwhile." In at least two Hebrew versions, "the word is "and." My perception is that the best Hebrew texts definitely use the word "and." I also believe that in this case the use of "meanwhile" or "now" does not violate the sense of the original text. The use of "meanwhile" suggests that while Ruth and Naomi were busy waiting, Boaz went to the gate. That is what happened. The use of "now" as in the American Standard Version, suggests that after Ruth and Naomi decided to wait to see what would happen, there was a change of scene. The spotlight shifts to the city gate. This also is true. I prefer the word "now," but it is not a major issue.

Just as Naomi told Ruth, Boaz wasted no time in finding the nearer-kinsman. He wanted to make the determination about who would carry out the Levirate responsibility. This is how the author described the scene:

*Meanwhile Boaz went up to the town gate and sat there. When the kinsman-redeemer he had mentioned came along, Boaz said, "Come over here, my friend, and sit down." So he went over and sat down. Ruth 4:1*

To our knowledge, Bethlehem was not a walled city. It was, on a number of occasions, called a "daughter of Jerusalem." A daughter was an unwalled community in the vicinity of a large, walled city. The "daughters" provided necessary supplies and services for the walled city and hoped, usually unsuccessfully, for protection within the city in times of danger. "The gate" was a large enclosure at the gate of the city where the elders met and legal matters were determined. In an unwalled community, like Bethlehem, "the gate" was a large enclosure at the entrance of the community, the village limits if you please, where elders met and legal matters were decided.

Boaz had a legal matter that needed to be determined, so he went to the gate. The text says that Boaz sat down in the gate. Early Jewish scholars believed Boaz was the head of the Sanhedrin. He was a man of important position in the community and may, indeed, have held this position, but there is no evidence to support such an assertion. Whatever the case, he sat down in the gate. This was a signal that he had business to transact with the elders.

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Our text says, "When the kinsman-redeemer he had mentioned came along." This sentence could be understood to mean that it was an accident or a miracle that the nearer-kinsman came along at this time. I don't believe it was an accident. It may have been a miracle, but most everyone in town would pass "the gate," at that time of day, on their way to or from the fields.

Observe that the text does not identify the nearer-kinsman. It may be that this is because the man did not prove willing to accept the responsibility that the Levirate law placed upon him. We do not know for certain.

Whatever the man's name, Boaz invited him to sit down in "the gate." The man may not have known, though he should have, but he could be certain that this was not a casual conversation. They were going to talk significant business which required the approval of the elders.

This man, whom Jewish scholars call "Tov" (טוב) which means "good," did as Boaz requested. This is not surprising since Boaz was a leader of the community, perhaps the leader of the Sanhedrin, and this nameless man was not.

The author's report, in verse two, is very meaningful for our Jewish friends. Observe how it was reported.

*Boaz took ten of the elders of the town and said, "Sit here." And they did so. Ruth 4:2*

From the time of Boaz until today, Jewish men have observed what they now call "minyan." Minyan literally means "number." When Jewish men meet to study Scripture, they must have ten Jewish men present in order to proceed with the study. If ten Jewish men (Minyan) are not present then they may not proceed until the proper number arrive. Otherwise, the study must be postponed. I have stood around for 45 minutes, at a Jewish synagogue waiting for the tenth Jewish man to arrive so that the Torah study could begin. This regulation dates back to the experience in Ruth 4:2. Boaz apparently invited ten elders to sit with them because that was considered the number required in order to conduct the work of elders. The ten elders complied with his request.

It was only after the ten men were seated, in their official capacity, that Boaz spoke to the nearer-kinsman about the issue he had in mind.

*Then he said to the kinsman-redeemer, "Naomi, who has come back from Moab, is selling the piece of land that belonged to our brother Elimelech. I thought I should bring the matter to your attention and suggest that you buy it in the presence of these seated here and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, do so. But if you will not, tell me, so I will know. For no one has the right to do it except you, and I am next in line. I will redeem it," he said. Ruth 4:3, 4*

Under Jewish law, if a person was in such financial straits that they must sell their land to survive, the kinsman-redeemer was required, if financially able, to buy the property. This requirement accomplished two things:

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- It kept the land in the family. This was important because the land was given to Israel by tribes and by families within that tribal designation. It would otherwise reflect negatively on the gift God had given this family.
- If a kinsman-redeemer bought the land, this prevents it from falling into Gentile hands. Jews would do almost anything to prevent this from happening.

This is the mission Boaz was pursuing that morning. His explanation was terse, but complete:

- Naomi returned from Moab.
- She must sell her land to survive.
- The land belonged to **our brother**.

These three pieces of information make it clear that it was appropriate for the kinsman-redeemer to come to the aid of his family member.

Two things in this description require clarification:

- Boaz spoke to the nearer-kinsman about Elimelech as "**our** brother." There could be at least two explanations for this statement.
  - ◇ It is possible that Boaz and the unnamed nearer-kinsman were indeed brothers of Elimelech. If this was true, then the unnamed brother is the oldest and Boaz is next in line among brothers.
  - ◇ It is just as possible that Boaz was the uncle of Elimelech and the unnamed brother was a nearer-kinsman. If this were true, then it means Elimelech had only one living brother and Boaz was the oldest living brother of Elimelech's father. The text is silent on the issue, but I favor the suggestion that Boaz was the uncle of the two and older than both. Whatever the case, Boaz wanted the nearer-kinsman redeemer to agree to buy or not to buy in the presence of the elders and thus make it a legally binding agreement.
- The second issue that requires description had to do with two different ways of disposing of property mentioned in verse four. In Ruth 4:4a, Boaz spoke to the nearer-kinsman about the property and said, "I thought I should bring the matter to your attention and suggest that you **buy** it.." In Ruth 4:4b, however, Boaz also said, "If you will **redeem** it, do so." There is a world of difference between "buying" and "redeeming" a piece of property:
  - You "**buy**" property because you want it.
  - You "**redeem**" property to keep it in the family whether you personally want it or not.
  - You "**buy**" property by dickering to get the lowest price possible.
  - You "**redeem**" property by generously giving the needy family member the highest possible price to aid them in their financial dilemma.

The question arises, Why would Boaz use both designations? It was not accidental. It may be that Ruth made a tentative agreement with a Gentile purchaser to establish the val-

ue of the land. The Gentile would cooperate just as a good neighbor. We are not certain. Boaz twice suggested redeeming the land. It seems he was urging the nearer-kinsman to "redeem" the property at the highest possible price.

In verse four, Boaz explained his thinking and outlined the options which were before the two of them. Boaz began by saying "I thought I should bring the matter to your attention." The Hebrew text, is more graphic, "I will open/uncover your ear." The suggestion, in both versions, is that the nearer-kinsman make a decision **now**. Saying, "Bring to your attention" can be seen as reminding someone of information they should know, but forgot. "Open your ear to" suggests new information.

We must observe that it is a bit strange that Boaz had to bring this matter to the attention of the nearer-kinsman. Because this man was the nearer-kinsman, he should have been the one to deal with the issue. It is not reasonable to think that the nearer-kinsman was unaware of Naomi's condition and her need to sell the land. It may be hard to understand, but it appears that this unnamed relative knew about Naomi's need, but was not anxious to take the responsibility that was rightfully his.

Whatever the cause of this hesitation, when confronted with his responsibility to redeem the land, before the elders, he agreed - "I will redeem it."

In verse four, Boaz also spelled out, for the nearer-kinsman, the situation they faced. Boaz described the options this way:

- "If you will do it, do so."
- "If you will not redeem it, tell me so I will know."

Boaz suggested the reason behind his confrontation by the use of the word "for." In such situations, this word indicates that a reason is forthcoming. The reasons Boaz gave were as follows:

- You have the first responsibility to redeem. The process can not move forward until you make a decision.
- I am next in line. If you choose not to redeem, then the responsibility falls to me, but I can do nothing until you announce your determination.

There was a hint of a mild reprimand in the words of Boaz. This was appropriate. This was a responsibility the eligible person **suggests** to the needy family that he perform, not one that others remind him to exercise.

The unnamed nearer-kinsman responded, "I will redeem it." This means there is no financial reason that he could not do what he and everyone else knew was expected of him for family members in need.

Boaz continued his reminder of the nearer-kinsman.

*Then Boaz said, "On the day you buy the land from Naomi and from Ruth the Moabitess, you acquire the dead man's widow, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property." Ruth 4:5*

There is a strong emphasis on the fact that Ruth came from Moab. At least five times in these four short chapters, Ruth was referred to as a "Moabitess." Whether the nearer-

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kinsman never knew the details of kinsman-redeemer and the Levirate law (which I doubt), or just needed to be reminded, we can not tell from the text.

One fact was pointed out earlier and needs to be reviewed again. In 1:16, Ruth explained to Naomi that she intended to become a Jew and worship the God of Israel. In 2:12, Boaz reminded Ruth of this step that she took. This is an extremely important piece of information. If Ruth had come to Bethlehem as a Moabitess, she would have had no claim on her husband's part of the land. Ruth came to Bethlehem, however, clearly committed to becoming a Jew and worshipping Jehovah by her personal choice. This being the case, the kinsman-redeemer responsibilities were considerably different. This chart shows the difference between the two situations:

RUTH AS A MOABITESS	RUTH AS A JEW
Kinsman must redeem the property of Elimelech	Kinsman must redeem property of Elimelech
No other requirements	Kinsman must redeem property of Mahlon to Ruth
	Kinsman must fulfill Levirate law - take Ruth as wife and raise up seed to the name of Mahlon

It should be noted that the financial obligation in both instances would be the same. In the second instance, "Ruth as a Jew," the property would be divided in two parts and half the price would go to Naomi and half to Ruth. The dollar amount would be the same in both instances. The difference would be in taking Ruth as a wife and raising up a son to continue the name of Mahlon.

In verse six, the nearer-kinsman responds to the reminder of Boaz.

*At this, the kinsman-redeemer said, "Then I cannot redeem it because I might endanger my own estate. You redeem it yourself. I cannot do it." Ruth 4:6*

In 4:5, the nearer-redeemer said he would redeem the land. There is no difference, financially, between what he agreed to do in 4:5 and what he declined to redeem in 4:6. The cause of his change of mind has to be something other than the financial consideration. The only other thing Boaz really added in 4:5 was that he would have to raise up seed to the name of Mahlon. This was his problem. Notice the reason he gave for his action, "Then I cannot redeem it because I might endanger my own estate." As we indicated earlier, the only reason a kinsman had for refusing the responsibility was personal financial crisis. It is questionable whether the reason the nearer-redeemer gave would qualify. Apparently, what he was talking about was the inheritance of his children, not his immediate financial situation. If he raised up a son to carry the name of Mahlon, that son would share equally the family inheritance with the nearer-redeemer's other sons. He said this would create a financial crisis he could not accept on behalf of his own sons. Again it is stretching a point to say that this is a financial crisis for the unnamed nearer-redeemer.

If Ruth had been present, she would have been required to spit in this man's face for refusing to carry out the Levirate responsibility. This would have been a public humilia-

tion for this man; a disgrace he could ill afford to receive. Fortunately for him, Boaz handled the matter and Ruth was not present.

There are some who contend that the unnamed, nearer-redeemer could/would not redeem Ruth because she was a Moabitess. There are two problems with this position:

- He should have known that the prohibition affected Moabites (males) and not a Moabitess (female).
- If it were disobedient for him to accept a Moabitess into his family, why then would he instruct Boaz, a leader of the community, a man who was well known because of his righteousness to do what would be wrong for him? Could it be that the reason Naomi sent Ruth to Boaz rather than the nearer-kinsman-redeemer was that she knew that he did not know/agree with the stipulation that allowed a Moabitess to be in Israel, but not a Moabite? We can not be sure.

It appears that the man was simply unwilling to reduce his own son's inheritance in order to meet the needs of a desperate kinsman. Whether or not Ruth performed the ritual in which she spat in his face, this man would be disgraced among his family. It is interesting that following this incident with the elders, the man is never again mentioned in Scripture.

It had to take a lot of gall for this nearer-kinsman to give Boaz the instruction, "You redeem it yourself. I cannot do it." Was it hatred for Moabites? Was it greed, lest his own sons would inherit less? We may never know.

#### **Ruth 4:7-12 - Boaz Claims Ruth as His Wife**

The author began this paragraph explaining an ancient custom. We know it dates back at least 800 or 900 years before the time of Boaz to the time of Abraham and before him, when property was redeemed, sold or exchanged. The explanation is in verse seven.

*(Now in earlier times in Israel, for the redemption and transfer of property to become final, one party took off his sandal and gave it to the other. This was the method of legalizing transactions in Israel.) Ruth 4:7*

We should observe that this verse is a short parenthesis in the midst of the story. The fact that the text says, "Now in **earlier** times," suggests that this was an ancient tradition in Israel. It also suggests that by the time this book was written, the tradition had ceased to be observed. This parenthesis also suggests that the book may have been written to people who were unfamiliar with this tradition. It was later observed, in the time of Paul, as "the earnest." When the arrangements were completed, the seller would remove his shoe/sandal and give it to the purchaser. This was a symbolic sale though no money had changed hands. It was as binding as cash payment. This symbol, called "kinyan," was a forerunner of what was later called "an earnest," where a small amount of dirt from the land was placed in a pouch and given to the purchaser. In modern times it would be similar to what we call an "option to buy."

In verse eight, the explanation having been given, the action is restated.

*So the kinsman-redeemer said to Boaz, "Buy it yourself." And he removed his sandal. Ruth 4:8*

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When he gave his right of redemption to Boaz, the nearer-kinsman instructed Boaz to "buy it yourself." Having said this the man drew off his shoe and gave it to Boaz. He would keep the symbol, the sandal, until the money had been given to Naomi, the marriage of Boaz and Ruth had been consummated and the documents were delivered. At that point there was no further need for Boaz to keep the symbol/sandal.

The agreement having been verified, Boaz proceeded with the necessary legal steps.

*Then Boaz announced to the elders and all the people, "Today you are witnesses that I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelech, Kilion and Mahlon. I have also acquired Ruth the Moabitess, Mahlon's widow, as my wife, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property, so that his name will not disappear from among his family and from the town records. Today you are witnesses!"*  
*Ruth 4:9, 10*

For the record, Boaz stated verbally what had been transacted symbolically. Boaz identified these transactions:

- He bought all that belonged to Elimelech.
- He bought all that belonged to Khilion.
- He bought all that belonged to Mahlon.
- He purchased Ruth as his wife.

Notice that Boaz began and ended his statement of the transactions by saying that these ten elders were witnesses, with all the people, of all that transpired that day.

We should note that Ruth did not have any say as to whether she would be married to Boaz. Marriage was not a specific choice for the bride or groom, but for their parents or representatives. In this instance, there was no choice for the widow or kinsman, unless he had financial limitations.

Observe also that Boaz added two stipulations to the sale:

- This marriage was to "raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance." This condition guaranteed that the child to be born was to bear the name of Mahlon, the deceased, childless relative.
- It also guaranteed that this child would inherit that which had belonged to Mahlon.

In the following verse, the words of Boaz were verified:

*Then the elders and all those at the gate said, "We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you have standing in Ephratah and be famous in Bethlehem. Through the offspring the LORD gives you by this young woman, may your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah."* *Ruth 4:11, 12*

There is an unusual feature in verse 11. It says all the people who gathered there to witness this event along with the elders affirmed that they were witnesses. The text does not explain this unusual happening. The witness of the ten elders would have been sufficient.

The text does not say, but it may be fair to assume that their presence indicated their approval.

The legal matters being completed, the elders and guests in the gate pronounced their four part blessing upon Boaz:

- "May the LORD make the woman coming into your house like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel." They referred to the fact that Rachel and Leah, along with their hand-maids, accounted for 12 children in Jacob's family. They were referring to the size of the family they wished for Ruth and Boaz.
- "May you have standing (wealth and power) in Ephratah (Bethlehem)." This is interesting. Boaz already had these. It could also be a way of saying, "we wish these to continue in your life."
- "May you be famous in Bethlehem." Again, Boaz was already held in high esteem throughout the village. They could be saying that they wished for him that in decades to come, long after his death, may Boaz be well remembered.
- "May your family be like that of Perez." Perez was the one who kept the lineage of Judah from becoming extinct. The crowd would be quick to draw the parallel between the two situations. This blessing makes it clear that Boaz held a very special place in the hearts of the people of Bethlehem.

#### Ruth 4:13-17 - Ruth Bore Obed; Naomi Became Nurse

Having completed the formalities, Boaz took Ruth as his wife. In order to be a leader in Israel, a man had to be married. We are safe in assuming that Boaz had been married prior to his marriage to Ruth. The fact that no other wife of Boaz is mentioned anywhere in the text suggests that the Jewish view, that she had just died, was quite possible. Notice how the author describes this new marriage:

*So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. And the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. Ruth 4:13*

Incidentally, the situation described in 4:13 was not required of a Levirate situation. In carrying out the Levirate responsibility, the kinsman-redeemer need not marry the widow. He was only required to raise up seed to her deceased, childless husband. Boaz went beyond the requirement and accepted Ruth as his wife.

The author said, "the Lord enabled her to conceive..." They considered the formation of a tiny child as much a part of the creative action of God as the formation of the universe. Notice that the author chose the name "LORD" by which to identify God in this creative activity. This is often the case in Scripture, and it is quite appropriate. The name "LORD" is "Jehovah" (יהוה) which identifies Him as the **Eternal** God. Only one who is **all powerful** could create. Only one who is **eternal** could create before time existed or could be counted.

The whole purpose of the Levirate law was to provide a son who would carry on the name of the deceased, childless husband. The birth of a daughter would not accomplish the purpose of this law. To the joy of the whole family, Ruth gave birth to a baby boy.

Verse 14 is quite meaningful, though it could be confusing.



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*The women said to Naomi, "Praise be to the Lord, who this day has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel!" Ruth 4:14*

The women mentioned in the verse spoke to Naomi and not to Ruth. The question immediately arises, Why did the women say these things to Naomi and not to Ruth? There are at least two possible reasons:

- This was probably a group of older ladies, grandmothers gathered at the well to talk. The younger women also gathered, but not with the older ones. The conversation quoted here was probably between Naomi and friends her own age.
- The most important reason this was shared with Naomi is that it affected her deceased husband. When a man died without a son, his name was doomed to become extinct. This was one of the worst things that could happen to him. The apostle John wrote to a mostly Jewish audience. In Revelation he records the words of the Lord to the church at Sardis. He said to them,

*"...you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never erase his name from the book of life." Revelation 3:4, 5*

Because both Chilion and Mahlon died without a son, their names would be disgraced. Without a son, their names would be forgotten. A byproduct of this tragedy was the fact that Elimelech's name would be disgraced and forgotten as well. This fact made the issue a vital concern for Naomi. It is, then, easy to understand why this would be spoken to her.

Notice that these women offered praise to the LORD. One of the subjects of their praise was, "...The LORD, who this day has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer." A question comes to mind. Why do they speak of the benefit of this child's birth as though this kinsman-redeemer fills a large void when Boaz had just demonstrated his concern for her as her kinsman-redeemer? This is the passage that convinced some Jewish scholars that Boaz died before this baby was born. We do not know if that is true or not.

It is reasonable to assume, however, that Boaz, then an old man, could die before Naomi did. In this child, they had hope of a kinsman to redeem as long as they lived.

These women pronounced their blessing on the little boy. You will observe that the blessing they implored upon this little one was the same as the one that was showered on his biological father, Boaz, in 4:11, by those who were "in the gate" when he claimed the right of kinsman. The wish of these women was prophetic, for he was well known for his place in the lineage of kings in Judah.

The women continued their prophetic message in verse 15.

*"He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth." Ruth 4:15*

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The women prophesied that this baby would do two things: He would renew her life and sustain her in her old age. A second reason it was important to have a son was that sons were, in that time, what Social Security is for us.

We can only assume that this is true. The Scriptures do not speak to the issue. In fact, Naomi is not mentioned outside the book of Ruth. Ruth is mentioned only once outside this book, in Matthew 1:5, where her name is listed in the genealogy of Jesus.

The ladies continued their remarks by giving the reason for the beautiful prophecy they had already given, "For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth." This is high praise of the first order. Remember, Ruth came from Moab and though the law did not forbid her coming, some people took a dim view of such a person living in Israel. It was a rare honor for a woman to say that another woman's daughter-in-law loved her. That was highly unusual. It was the reverse of the experiences of most families.

The women continued their praise of Ruth and Naomi saying that she, "...was better to you (Naomi) than seven sons." Two cultural images stand out in this statement.

In the Jewish household, then as now, the mother was the queen. She was doted upon and given great deference and respect by her children, particularly her sons. To say that Ruth was better to Naomi than seven sons, was a monumental accolade.

The ladies spoke of **seven** sons. Jewish people tended to place a lot of emphasis on numbers and the meaning associated with each number. The number seven was called a perfect number. This they illustrated by saying that there are seven days in the week. There are seven days of creation - the Sabbath celebration of creation being considered a part of that creative process. To speak of "seven sons" was to think in terms of the perfect family as far as sons were concerned.

These women praised Ruth to her mother-in-law, saying this one who was better to Naomi than seven sons would be, was the one who gave birth to the kinsman-redeemer, for Naomi and her family.

There is an amazing picture in the following verse. Notice how the author describes it:

*Then Naomi took the child, laid him in her lap and cared for him. Ruth 4:16*

Naomi took responsibility for the care of Ruth's baby as if she were the maid-servant who was charged with that task. This was shocking. Naomi had known great wealth. In that time of her life, she had someone to do everything for her. Now at a time in her life when she would be expected to do a bit less, she volunteered to take on the monumental task of being the baby's nurse. Ruth's love for Naomi was legendary. Naomi's love for Ruth was never less.

The women of the community spoke with Naomi again:

*The women living there said, "Naomi has a son." And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David. Ruth 4:17*

A woman's sense of worth, in that culture, was tied to the lives of her children and their children after them. If there were no children, then the woman had no sense of worth. She was even thought of as being punished for some hidden sin. If her children died before

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grandchildren were born, her sense of worth was destroyed because there were no children to be heirs to carry on the name of her husband. It was her responsibility to make sure that there was an heir to take over the control of the family and preserve the name. If she failed to do this, she had failed as a wife/woman.

We must remember that the women got together at the well at least every day. A question immediately comes to mind. Why would these women say, "Naomi has a son"? Certainly it was clear to everyone that it was Ruth who gave birth to this baby. We know that there were a few very strict people who probably did not accept Ruth because she came from Moab. Some of these people only accepted a person as a Jew if they came from totally Jewish parents. They did not accept people who **became** Jews through baptism and accepting the Jewish way of life and worship. These people would have a problem with Ruth because she was neither a relative by birth, nor a Jewess born of Jewish parents. This takes on significantly greater importance in the next paragraph. Others might speak of the child as being Naomi's because it would be considered her grandchild. Grandchildren were sometimes spoken of as the children of the grandparents.

There is a bit of a cultural shock in the very next sentence. It says, "And they named him Obed." The word "they" in this sentence refers to the women of the community. Children were not named by the women of the neighborhood. In Luke, chapter one, friends were determined to name a little baby "Zechariah" after his father. Elizabeth, the boy's mother, said, "No! he is to be called John." This did not satisfy relatives and friends. They argued with her because no one in the family was named John. Undaunted, the friends and relatives turned to the father, Zechariah. Though he could not speak at this time, he asked for a writing tablet and astonished everyone when he wrote, "His name is John." He did not write, "I think his name should be John." He wrote about an accomplished fact, - "His name is John." It was the father's prerogative to name his child. If that is true, then why didn't Boaz name his son? It may have been, as the Jewish scholars claim, because Boaz was dead. It could also have been because this child was born, not to carry the name of Boaz, but of Mahlon. "They named him Obed." This name means "serving," one who serves. We do not know where the women got this name. There was no one in Scripture prior to this time, who bore this name, though some were named after him. The meaning of his name may give us a clue. The relationship between Naomi, Ruth and Boaz was characterized by mutual service. It is possible that these women were celebrating that wonderful relationship.

If Boaz had died, why didn't the relative who gave his redemptive right to Boaz name the child? This is a good question. Call to mind, in Ruth 4:6, this man surrendered his position as kinsman-redeemer. He could never again be called upon to serve in this capacity in any way. He was no longer considered a kinsman.

There is a beautiful contrast in the closing portion of this paragraph. In verse 17, there is a picture of an infant who had several strikes against him. He was fathered by an elderly kinsman-redeemer, who probably died soon after. He apparently had to be named by the women of the community because of a lack of father or kinsman. The author, however closes the paragraph with the climax which announced that this obscure child became the one who was the grandfather of Israel's greatest king - David. This makes it clear that the

name Mahlon as well as his father Elimelech was not blotted out. In fact, the lineage of Mahlon exists even today.

#### **Ruth 4:18-22 - The Lineage From Perez to David**

It is clear that the climax of the book of Ruth is in 4:17, where the author announced that Obed was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

Some have suggested that because 4:17 is the climax, 4:18-22 was not really a part of the book. I cannot support this line of thinking. I agree that 4:17 is the climax. It appears, however, that 4:18-22, though anticlimactic, serve a formidable function in the book. I shall seek to demonstrate the basis for my thinking in this area.

*This, then, is the family line of Perez: Perez was the father of Hezron" Ruth 4:18*

In this verse, we are confronted with a serious question. If the author is going to list the lineage of David, as he is obviously doing, then why does he begin with Perez? Perez was the son of Judah. Why not start with Judah, after all he was the father of the royal tribe? This is the lineage of Israel's greatest king and ultimately the lineage of the Messiah. Look at the life of Judah. In Jacob's home, Judah was not exemplary in any positive way. The fourth son of Jacob, Judah knew that what he and his brothers were doing to Joseph was wrong, but he lacked the strength of character and courage to take a lonely stance among his brothers. The best he could do was suggest an alternative to the immediate death of starving in a dry cistern by selling Joseph as a slave to a caravan of Midianites. The average life of a slave was approximately two years. This was hardly an exemplary beginning for a royal lineage. There was also the illicit relationship with Tamar that clouded his reputation and proved to be an embarrassment to every generation of Jewish people since that time. Perez was a twin with Zarah - born to Judah and Tamar.

You may remember, we dealt with Perez in Ruth 4:12 where the people of the gate wished a blessing upon Ruth, whom Boaz would take as his wife. The blessing was that her family would be like that of Perez. There are some pointed parallels between the two families:

- Both Perez and Obed were born in situations where there was no male heir and the kinsman-redeemer role was refused by the appropriate party.
- In both instances, their birth grew out of a situation of disobedience.
- Both men, born of ignominious beginnings, became rescuers of their father's name and key individuals in the lineage of the royal family and eventually of the Messiah.

The author continued listing the lineage of the family line of Perez by identifying his son Hezron. There does not seem to be any problem with Hezron.

*Hezron the father of Ram, Ram the father of Amminadab. Ruth 4:19*

Our text speaks of "Hezron the father of Ram." It is interesting that the lineage does not consistently move through the first born, the honored member of the family. Our text speaks of Hezron and says, "the father of Ram," According to I Chronicles 2:9, Ram, sometimes called Aram, was the second son of Hezron. The eldest son of Hezron was Je-

## BOAZ MARRIES RUTH

rahmeel. We know that Jerahmeel had two wives, one of which was a Canaanite. He may have been overlooked, for the lineage of David, because of this.

The author continued by identifying Ram as the father of Amminadab. We learn in Exodus 6:23 that "Aaron married Elisheba, daughter of Amminadab..." We do not know much more about him.

*Amminadab the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon. Ruth 4:20*

Amminadab was the father of Nahshon. He was the prince of Judah and captain of the host of Judah. He was thought, by many scholars, to have been the first to move into the waters of the Red Sea when the children of Israel crossed during the Exodus. He ultimately died in the wilderness, Numbers 26:64, 65.

Nahshon, or Nasshon, was the father of Salmon, sometimes called Salma. We know that he was a brother of Elimelech and Tov. The latter brother, Tov, is thought to be the unnamed kinsman-redeemer mentioned in Ruth, chapter three. Salmon was apparently the one who married Rahab following the fall of Jericho.

*Salmon the father of Boaz, Boaz the father of Obed. Ruth 4:21*

Salmon was the father of Boaz. If this is accurate, then Boaz was the uncle or cousin of Elimelech. There are a number of scholars who believe that Boaz was the brother of Elimelech. Firm evidence is not currently available.

Boaz was the father of Obed. We must ask a question at this point: According to the Levirate law, the child Boaz fathered was supposed to carry on the name of Mahlon. If that is true, then why does this verse speak of Boaz as the father of Obed?

For one thing, Boaz was the biological father of Obed. Technically, the text should indicate that Obed was the son of Mahlon. This, however, would create a problem. As we indicated in chapter two of this study, Mahlon, along with his father Elimelech, and Chilion, his brother, left the land of Canaan without a divine command to do so. This was considered a blatant disobedience to God and totally unacceptable. This would be an embarrassment in the lineage of David, to say nothing of the lineage of the Messiah.

Five Old Testament men bear the name of "Obed" or "Oved" in Hebrew, which meant, "one who serves, or worshipper." The Obed mentioned in the book of Ruth was the son of Ruth, who became a Jew and Boaz, a native-born Jew. Obed/Oved was considered to be fully a Jew. Outside the book of Ruth, Obed appears only in three chronologies - I Chronicles 2:12; Matthew 1:5; Luke 3:32.

*Obed the father of Jesse, Jesse the father of David. Ruth 4:22*

Obed was the father of Jesse. Jesse came from a family that was hardly known in a tribe that was held in low esteem in Israel. These men represented the people of very modest means and station. Saul spoke of David as a Bethlehemite in derision. Despite his modest means and relative obscurity, Jesse was probably the "sheik" or tribal leader in Bethlehem.

Jesse was the father of David. Giving the lineage of David, like giving the lineage of Joseph, is a study of the incredible. Joseph, at his birth, was the youngest of eleven sons. No one would ever expect him to amount to anything, or to make much of a mark. So

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much for human expectations. David was the youngest of Jesse's eight sons. Coming from a family that was unknown outside Bethlehem, no one could expect any of Jesse's sons to become prominent, much less the youngest one. None-the-less, David became not only Israel's greatest king, but also the key link in the lineage of the Messiah. He represents the golden era of the Jewish monarchy.

### Review

At the beginning of this chapter, there is a table which summarizes the content of each paragraph. It is repeated here.

4:1-6	Boaz Confronts Relative About Levirate Law
4:7-12	Boaz Claimed Ruth as His Wife
4:13-17	Ruth Bore Obed; Naomi Became Nurse
4:18-22	The Lineage from Perez to David

If you study this table, you will observe that the story reaches its climax in 4:13-17. The story actually ends with the birth of Obed. In Ruth, chapter one, the story begins with a dilemma - Elimelech and his two sons died and there was no heir to carry on the family name and to be the head of the family. The closing sentence of the story, 4:17, identifies Obed's place in the family.

Observe that 4:18-22 give a much fuller account of the information in 4:17. We will deal with the reason behind the inclusion of 4:18-22 in the concluding chapter of this book.

As we have done with each chapter, we want to summarize what the text teaches about the people involved and about God.

### Boaz

4:1 **Dependable** - He was a man of his word. He said he would care for the matter and he did.

4:1 **Kind** - He spoke to the nearer-kinsman as "my friend" even though Boaz could not understand why this relative had, until then, failed to fulfill his kinsman duty.

4:2 **Thorough** - He got the ten elders to hear the situation just as he was supposed to do.

4:3 **Direct** - He told the nearer-kinsman exactly what the situation and his own intentions were.

4:4 **Gentle** - Rather than reprimanding the nearer-kinsman for his reluctance, he talked of "bringing the matter to his attention" as if he had overlooked it.

4:4 **Open** - He told the nearer-kinsman to take Ruth if he chose even though Boaz was ready to do this himself.

4:9 **Responsible** - He did everything exactly as it was supposed to be done.

## BOAZ MARRIES RUTH

### Ruth

4:11 **Loved** - She was blessed by the Jewish women whom she had known only a short time.

4:13 **Blessed by God** - She was able to conceive a son. This was very important. They thought of this as a blessing from God.

4:15 **Loving** - She loved her mother-in-law which very few daughters-in-law could claim.

4:15 **Genuine** - She was better to Naomi than seven sons.

### Naomi

4:14 **Blessed** - God blessed Naomi by providing her with a dependable kinsman in the person of Boaz and for the future in his son Obed.

4:15 **Lovable** - Even her daughter-in-law loved her. This was noteworthy in that culture.

4:16 **Mature in personality** - She was able to take a servants role for her daughter-in-law and be the nurse for Obed.

### God

Though much of chapter four deals with the mechanics of carrying out the Levirate law, still God is mentioned.

4:11 **Powerful** - the Lord - Jehovah - enabled Ruth to conceive and bear a son.

4:12 **Generous** -The Lord (Jehovah) gives children to His people.

4:14 **Merciful** - He provided Naomi with a current and future kinsman-redeemer.

The references to God, in chapter four, cover four very important issues:

- The name "Lord" was used throughout. The chapter stresses the fact that God is all powerful. This is in sharp contrast to the helpless carvings Ruth's family worshipped in Moab.
- Jehovah was generous. This was just the opposite of what Ruth remembered of the pagan idols from her childhood.
- Jehovah was merciful. Idols were thought to be undependable, searching for ways to devastate those who worshipped them.
- God was different. Mercy characterized everything He did in the life of Ruth the Moabitess.





## RUTH: THE CONCLUSION

If you have been observing the summaries of the descriptions given in each chapter concerning the participants there are some observations which need to be highlighted. The following table will give some summary information which is helpful in drawing our conclusions concerning the book of Ruth.

RUTH	NAOMI	BOAZ
Blessed by God	Appreciative	Appreciative 2*
Congenial	Believer	Caring
Determined	Blessed	Concerned - 2
Disciplined	Concerned	Dependable - 2
Faithful	Eager to help	Direct
Generous	Faithful	Generous - 4
Genuine	Forgiving	Gentle
Good worker - 2*	Honest	Grateful
Honest	Kind	Honest
Humble - 4	Lovable	Kind - 3
Loved	Mature	Open
Loving	Open	Protective
Loyal	Sacrificial	Provident
Noble	Sensitive	Responsible
Obedient	Spiritual	Spiritual - 2
Open		Thorough
Polite		
Respectful		
Sacrificial		
Spiritual		
Thoughtful		
Unassuming		

*\*The numbers, beside different qualities in the above table, indicate the number of times this quality was mentioned.*

As you can observe, from the table above, the author describes more qualities of Ruth than the other two, but the difference between them is not that great. You can also observe that many of the traits that are identified about Ruth are also true for both Naomi and Boaz.

Notice on the table below that the numbers are not that widely separated.

## STANDING ALONE, BUT NEVER LONELY

NAME	NUMBER OF REFERENCES	CHARACTERISTICS
RUTH	31	22
NAOMI	18	15
BOAZ	25	16

Both of the above tables indicate that there are more references and more specific characteristics listed for Ruth than for Naomi and Boaz, but the difference is not nearly as significant as some might think. Add to this the fact that many of the characteristics ascribed to Ruth have been identified for both Naomi and Boaz as well. This information is not conclusive, but it is evidence which must be taken into consideration when one determines what this book is about.

There are some other pieces of information which require our attention as well. You may have noticed that there are two distinct types of people who enter the spotlight of this book. The people involved are as follows:

DISOBEDIENT	OBEDIENT
ELIMELECH	RUTH
MAHLON	NAOMI
CHILION	BOAZ
KINSMAN	
ORPAH	

If you reflect upon the lives of the disobedient, you will observe that we never hear from any one of them again in Scripture. The sum total of their respective lives was oblivion. They may have had sons to carry on their name, but their contributions to life collectively passed into oblivion.

On the other hand, the scenario for the obedient is quite different. These people purposed to obey God with their lives. The result of each life was that they figured prominently in the lineage of the greatest king of Israel and ultimately in the lineage of the Jewish Messiah. No greater sense of worth and accomplishment could be imagined in the Hebrew mind. It is not accidental that the author, having climaxed the story in 4:17, goes on to emphasize the fact that Obed, the child born to Ruth and Boaz, was a key figure in the lineage of David.

The final piece of evidence is in the closing paragraph of the book, 4:18-22. The book carries the name of Ruth, who is supposed to be the main character of the book. As you read this brief book again, you will notice that Ruth is not even mentioned in the closing paragraph. If she is the main character, then it seems strange that she is not mentioned in the closing paragraph.

## RUTH: THE CONCLUSION

The closing paragraph appears to be a bit out of character with the rest of the book. It is not. It is, rather, a dramatic climax to the picture of how God deals with the righteous and the unrighteous.

The unrighteous leave no mark and we never hear from them again. The righteous, on the other hand, make an important contribution. Ruth 4:18-22 form a dramatic example of that contribution. The righteous become the ones through whom God brought forth Israel's greatest king and ultimately the Messiah, the savior of all who trust in God. This is a very dramatic presentation about God.

### **View of God Presented in Ruth**

Almighty

Blesses ----- 8\*

Compassionate

Eternal ----- 3

Generous

Judge

Kind

Merciful --- 2

Personal

Powerful --- 3

Praised ----- 2

Punishes

Refuge ----- 2

\* - the numbers listed beside the qualities of God, in the above list, indicate the number of times this quality appears in the text.

It is my considered opinion, that Ruth is not the central figure in this story; God is. The author used the dramatic story of the lives of the obedient and disobedient to tell us something vivid about who God is. God is the one who blesses the lives of the obedient with meaning, purpose and value. At the same time, God is the one who judges the disobedient, allowing their lives to pass unnoticed from the scene into oblivion without leaving their mark upon the history of His people in any way. As we pointed out earlier, the most tragic thing that could happen to the Jewish man was for his name to be obliterated.

You may remember, at the beginning of our study, we pointed out that this story took place at a very volatile time in the history of Israel. Famine had been severe and inter-tribal relations had been poor.

The author pointed out that in the worst of times, those who turn to their own ways and do evil will be obliterated. On the other hand, those who obey and follow God, selflessly, will be abundantly blessed and used of God. They will leave an enduring mark on the history of people.

In quiet and unassuming ways, the power and majesty of God assert themselves to reveal His mercy and His greatness throughout this entire book.

STANDING ALONE, BUT NEVER LONELY

# THE INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF ESTHER

## **The Times**

From the days of Jeremiah (625-423 BC) roughly 200 years, Israel was captive to the Babylonians and their Persian successors. From the end of the ministry of the prophet Zechariah, 489 - to the beginning of Malachi's ministry 435 (54 years) - there was no prophet in captive Israel. It was during this dark period that the events of the book of Esther took place. These events covered a period of about ten years.

## **Conditions**

Whatever else may be true, the people of Israel were slaves deported to the land of their captors - Babylonia/Persia. Slavery is never pleasant. Israel's lot under Ahazuerus, however, was much better than it had been in Egypt. Ezra and Nehemiah had been given permission, people and money to return to rebuild the walls and the temple in Jerusalem. Though they were still slaves, life was, for the most part, relatively congenial for them, with one notable exception.

## **The Author**

The book of Esther gives us no hint concerning the name of the author. We could only guess who might have written the book. Tradition is no help at all in this search.

## **Information about the Book**

The name of God is not mentioned in the book. This does not mean that it is a secular account - just the opposite. It appears that this book really focuses upon God, but does so in terms of God working through the lives of His people.

As you study this book, you will find an unusually high number of situations where the author does not give us vital information. It is not too difficult for us to decide what we think the missing information is, but we are not told in so many words. This should make us a bit tenuous in our decisions about these events and situations in the book.

## **Ahazuerus**

Ahazuerus was the king of Medo-Persia. We cannot say for certain, but it appears that this was Xerxes, who reigned from about 486 - 465 BC. The information available seems to fit this king rather than others. We will speak of this king as Xerxes throughout the book.

If this was Xerxes, then we know that he was the son of Darius the Great. He would have been the second of three kings to bear this name. During the third year of his reign, he arranged the Grecian war in which he was defeated. If he were to remain in power, he would have to do something to divert the attention of his enemies. Every king had many enemies. They would be quite willing to kill him to remove him from power so that they could take his place.

It appears that his viceroy was Haman. There is serious question concerning whether Haman was of Medo-Persian background. Strong evidence suggests that he was probably a captive from an Amalekite background.

## Esther

Esther is a Persian name which we identify with Ishtar. It comes from the name of the star- Venus and was the name of the goddess of fertility who was worshipped throughout the Near East. Esther's real name was Hadassah, which means myrtle. Again, we do not know how Hadassah came to be called by this Persian name when Mordecai retained his Hebrew name.

Esther came from a Benjamite family. Her father's name was Abihail. We do not know how Esther came to be part of the family of Mordecai. It is assumed that the immediate family were all killed during the war when Nebuchadnezzar conquered Israel. Only under these conditions would Esther go to live with a cousin.

Throughout this book we will repeatedly encounter specific hints concerning the personality and character of Esther. We will need to take note of these so that as we near the close of the study we can reflect on what she was like.

## An Overview of the Book

Very often one can gain a significant understanding about a Biblical book by studying a brief overview of the book. We will begin with such an overview and then return to consider it again at the end of our study.

CHAPTER	SUMMARY
1	Vashti Refused the King's Command
2	Esther Became Queen
3	Haman Plots to Kill Jews
4	Esther Agreed to Go to the King
5	Esther Risked Everything to Take Her Stand
6	Mordecai Finally Honored
7	Haman Hanged on His Own Gallows
8	Mordecai Given Honor and Power
9	Haman's Sons Hanged on His Gallows
10	Ahazuerus Honored Mordecai

As you look at this table, you will observe that there are some problems with the progression of it. This will not hamper our study, but we want you to be aware of the situation, now. We will not dwell on this problem now, but we will return to it later in the study.

## QUESTIONS FOR ESTHER LESSON 1

### ESTHER 1:1 – 22

#### VASHTI REFUSED THE KING'S COMMAND

1. There are three paragraphs in Esther chapter one. On the following table, write a summary of seven words or less for each paragraph.

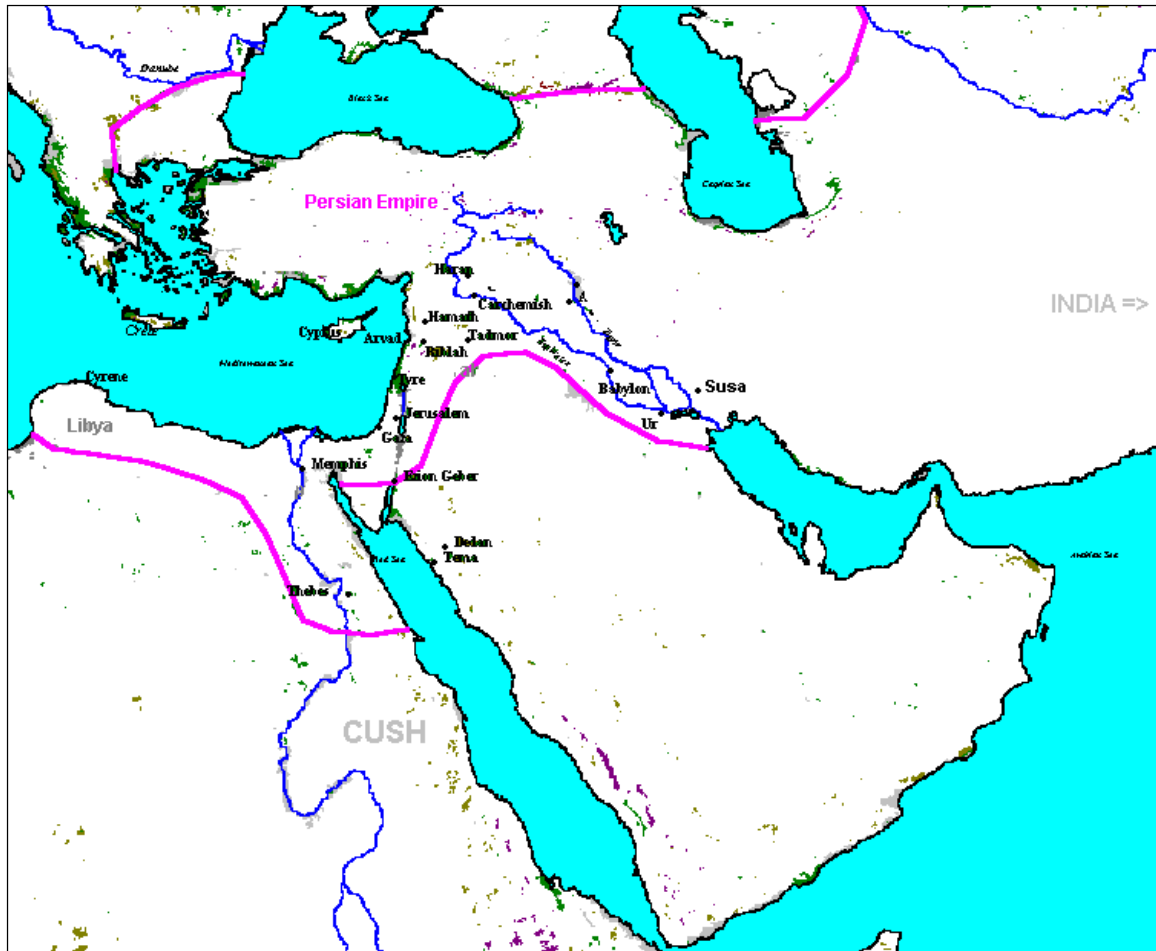
1:1-8	
1:9-12	
1:13-22	

2. In 1:1-8, a great feast was held by Xerxes, the king.
- 1:1, 2, give us some information about the Medo-Persian empire.
    - Think carefully about the statements in 1:1, 2. What did you discover?
    - Look at the map of the empire on page 97. What observations can you make about the empire?
  - In 1:3, 4, the author described an unbelievable banquet.
    - Study these verses carefully.
    - The text indicates that this feast took place in the third year of Xerxes' reign. Why would this be important?
    - What would be the purpose of a feast lasting 180 days?
    - When people show off their wealth, in our time and culture, we are offended. What would be the value of Xerxes doing such a thing?
  - In 1:5, the king gave another feast.
    - How was this feast different from the other?
    - What was the importance of the second feast?
  - In 1:6, the author described the decor of the "gardens." Why would this be important to this study?
  - In 1:7, the author described the golden vessels from which the guests drank.
    - What is the value of having cups made of gold?
    - What does it add to tell us that the design of each cup was different?
    - What is the author trying to convey to us?
  - In 1:8, the king directed that each guest be allowed to drink in his own way.
    - What does this mean?
    - What does this tell you about the king?
3. In 1:9-12, the king commanded that Vashti appear at the banquet wearing her crown.
- In 1:9, Queen Vashti also made a feast for the women.
    - What would be the reason for having a separate feast for the women?
    - Might this be part of Xerxes' plan behind the feasts he conducted?
  - In 1:10, 11, the author described the party that lasted too long and celebrated too much.
    - What did the king do?
    - What reason was given for this action?
    - What does this mean?
  - In 1:12, Vashti responded to the command of the king.

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- (1). What was her response?
- (2). How did the king react to this response? Why?
4. In 1:13-22, the king gave an official reaction to Vashti's response.
  - a. In 1:13, Xerxes consulted with his wise men.
    - (1). What does this tell you about the king?
    - (2). Why would the king consult political advisors about a family disagreement?
  - b. In 1:14, the author identified the seven advisors to the king.
    - (1). Why might this be important?
    - (2). What did the author say about that?
    - (3). What does this description mean?
  - c. In 1:15, Xerxes confronted his legal advisors with the question which troubled him.
    - (1). What was his question?
    - (2). If you were one of these advisors, how would you feel? Why?
    - (3). What hint, if any, did the men have concerning what the king had in mind?
  - d. In 1:16, Memucan answered the king.
    - (1). What does the fact that Memucan answered tell you?
    - (2). To what extent did Memucan answer the king's question? Why?
  - e. In 1:17, Memucan continued his response.
    - (1). What does 1:17 add to Memucan's response in 1:16?
    - (2). In what way does this verse answer the king's legal question?
  - f. In 1:18, Memucan described the consequences of this entire event.
    - (1). What did he predict would happen?
    - (2). Was that a reasonable prediction?
  - g. In 1:19, Memucan finally made a recommendation.
    - (1). What was it?
    - (2). He was very specific. Why was that necessary?
    - (3). What did he recommend for Vashti?
    - (4). In view of the law, was this a reasonable suggestion?
  - h. In 1:20, Memucan made a prediction concerning the outcome.
    - (1). What was his prediction?
    - (2). Was it a reasonable prediction?
  - i. In 1:21, Xerxes responded to the recommendation of his advisors.
    - (1). What did he do?
    - (2). What does this tell us?
  - j. In 1:22, action was taken to carry out the advice of the seven wise men.
    - (1). What did they do?
    - (2). What message was conveyed to the provinces?
    - (3). What is the importance of using the native tongue of each people?
5. Reflect on the entire chapter. What, if anything, does this chapter tell us about God?





The Persian Empire from India to Cush



## LESSON 1: – ESTHER 1:1 – 22

### VASHTI REFUSED THE KING'S COMMAND

#### Introduction

There are three paragraphs in Esther chapter one. A summary of the content of each appears on the following table:

1:1-8	Ahasuerus Called for a Feast
1:9-12	Vashti Refused the King's Command
1:13-22	Ahasuerus Bans Vashti

#### Esther 1:1-8 - Ahasuerus Called for a Feast

Though it does not appear so in some texts, verses one through four form a single sentence. We will keep this in mind, but deal with the verses one by one.

Verse one provides an interesting opening to the book.

*This is what happened during the time of Xerxes, the Xerxes who ruled over 127 provinces stretching from India to Cush: Esther 1:1*

Some translations identify the king as "Ahasuerus," while others call him "Xerxes." The Hebrew text identifies the king as "Ahasuerus." The Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament, refers to him as "Artaxerxes." This is not a possibility. Most scholars agree that the man in question is known by the Greek name "Xerxes," who ruled from 486-465 BC

The text gives us some very clear information about this king:

- He ruled over territory which probably included all the land from Ethiopia to India. This was one of the largest kingdoms in history.
- He ruled for 21 years - 486-465 BC

If these dates are correct, and we believe that they are probably close, then we can make some assertions that will help us get an idea of what life was like at that time.

- We can be reasonably sure that no known prophet served during this period of time in captivity.
- Ezra had finished the reconstruction of the temple.
- Ahasuerus/Xerxes was a Persian ruler who followed 'Darius I, Cambyses and Cyrus, who had taken over the Babylonian empire from Belshazzar.

The empire would look something like this:

As you can see from the map on page 97, this was a huge empire. It took a great leader to be able to successfully rule over such a great empire.

The next verse may sound a bit strange to us, but it is not.

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*At that time King Xerxes reigned from his royal throne in the citadel of Susa, Esther 1:2*

This is a way of saying that by this time, Xerxes had consolidated his position as king. Prior to this time, he was struggling to convince the people that he was going to be the ruler. The times, when the control of power are not well defined, are uneasy in any kingdom. Every kingdom breathed a bit easier when the new ruler's claim to power was established. Because Medo-Persia was so large and unwieldy, it was even more difficult to gain the confidence of the people that Xerxes would indeed be the ruler of the realm.

The seat of government was in Shushan as it had been during the reign of Darius I, his predecessor. This suggests that the transfer of power though complicated, was not outwardly unfriendly. This great palace, where Xerxes lived was in Shushan or "Susa" as it was sometimes called. You can see its location on the map above.

Verses three and four describe an experience which is beyond our wildest imagination.

*and in the third year of his reign he gave a banquet for all his nobles and officials. The military leaders of Persia and Media, the princes, and the nobles of the provinces were present. For a full 180 days he displayed the vast wealth of his kingdom and the splendor and glory of his majesty. Esther 1:3-4*

This banquet was the sign that the power of the huge kingdom was safely in the hands of Xerxes. He would not have dared to throw a great party until this had been accomplished. The fact that this was in the third year of his reign indicates that there was a power struggle for the three years. The extent of this turmoil is hard to imagine.

Notice that this party went on for six months. We have a hard time dealing with a celebration which lasts two days, as weddings do in some parts of the world. To contemplate a six months feast exceeds our imaginative abilities. We should remember that it does not mean that they went into the banquet hall and did not emerge for six months. It does mean that this was a six months long period of celebration and festivities in honor of Xerxes rise to power. There would be a host of banquets and assemblies during that six months. All of these were intended to celebrate the rise of Xerxes to power.

During this six month period of celebration, the king was expected to show how lavish a party he could produce. The more expensive and extravagant the festivities the king produced, the greater he was considered to be. During this six month period, Xerxes looked for every excuse to have a festival in his own honor. He would invite every possible dignitary and spare no cost in sponsoring extravagant feasts, expensive decorations and every possible kind of entertainment.

*When these days were over, the king gave a banquet, lasting seven days, in the enclosed garden of the king's palace, for all the people from the least to the greatest, who were in the citadel of Susa. Esther 1:5*

At the end of the six months' festival in his honor, Xerxes threw one last party for the common people of Shushan. This was important because it was expedient for him to have their good will. If an enemy decided to oppose Xerxes, he would need the common people on his side to bring down the government. Most every king did something of this sort to cement relations with the common people.

## VASHTI REFUSED THE KING'S COMMAND

In the following verse, the author described the decorating of the palace itself.

*The garden had hangings of white and blue linen, fastened with cords of white linen and purple material to silver rings on marble pillars. There were couches of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl and other costly stones. Esther 1:6*

First, just being allowed into the palace was a treat for the poor commoners. Most of them had never been inside the palace, unless they worked there. Notice the things the author singled out to describe the decorations.

The basic decorations were hangings. Now, remember that the palace was a mammoth place. There were literally thousands of people present for this week long celebration. This is entertainment on the grand scale. The cloth hangings were suspended on silver rings - thousands of them. Remember that contrary to our value system, their most precious metal was silver, not gold. These silver rings were fastened to pillars of marble - their most precious building stone.

The manuscripts do not agree on the composition of the hangings.

ASV	NIV	KJV	TEXTUS RECEP- TUS	NASB
Fine cloth, white linen, cotton, blue	White and blue linen	White, green and blue hangings	white linen and violet	White and violet linen

Our texts here are not strong, but the better documents seem to favor the ASV translation. Observe that all of these translations describe cloth that was rare and extremely expensive.

1. **The "fine cloth"** - This was a way that they described white linen. Linen, made from flax, was extremely fine by their standards and the cost was commensurate with its rarity. Most of their cloth was natural - a light, tan in color. To make tan cloth white took bleaching which was done in the sun and by using certain washes made from plants. This was very time consuming and equally expensive.
2. Some hangings were made from **cotton**. This cloth was grown in Egypt and processed by them. Cotton clothing could only be afforded by the extremely rich and powerful.
3. **Blue cloth** - Blue and purple dye was made from the crushing of sea shells found in a bay off the coast of Phoenicia. These mollusk shells had to be pulverized in order to get the true color. Some of these dyes were prepared from vegetable materials. Even this could be very expensive.

It took a vast fortune just to make the cloth for these hangings. They would still have to make the hangings and position them in the palace. The eyes of common people would bug as they saw this beautiful scene.

The author next described "the couches," or "beds." The word for "couches" is "mit-tah" (מִטָּה) and can be translated "bed" or "pillow." We must remember that these people did not sit on a chair to eat. They would lie down beside a low table. The words "couch" or "bed" might suggest that Xerxes provided beds for all these people to sleep at the palace. That is not the intent. It described a large "pillow" on which they would lie down to eat.

That is not all. The author also described the natural appearance of the palace itself. These pillows were placed on marble flooring which was red, white, yellow and black. Marble flooring was extremely expensive even then. Add to this the unusual colors of marble of which this floor was made and you have a monumental expense. these colors of the marble of which this floor was made was a dazzling sight. Just the accumulation and preparation of these marble paving stones would take years to do by hand.

These "couches" were made of silver and gold. Now, a pillow made of silver or gold thread would be very expensive, But the rich could manage it . Think, however, of making covers for thousands of these huge pillows out of silver or gold thread and you are dealing with a great fortune for pillows that would be used for just one week. Xerxes gave the poor commoners a taste of what it was like to be rich. Was he starting something he intended to repeat? Did he ever do this again? We do not know.

The author then turned his attention to the palace itself. These pillows were placed on marble flooring which was red, white, yellow and black. Marble flooring was extremely expensive even then. Add to this the unusual colors of marble of which this floor was made and you have a dazzling sight. Just the preparation of these marble paving stones would take years to do by hand.

Having described the banquet hall, the author turned his attention to the table settings. Notice the way he described it.

*Wine was served in goblets of gold, each one different from the other, and the royal wine was abundant, in keeping with the king's liberality. Esther 1:7*

There are two distinct and important pieces of information in this verse that give us an impression of the lavishness of this feast.

1. The goblets from which they drank, were made of gold. Now, gold was not their most precious metal; silver was. Nevertheless, gold was very precious. To make thousands of goblets from gold would be very costly.
2. No two of these goblets were alike. If one makes many copies of a given design, then one becomes practiced in the skill of making that design. It takes less and less time to design. If, however, each goblet must be a different design, then it becomes harder and more time consuming to find new designs and much more time consuming to execute these unpracticed designs. Indeed, some interpret this passage to mean that they even did not use the same goblet twice. This is possible, but not probable.

There is an interesting piece of information in the following verse.

*By the king's command each guest was allowed to drink in his own way, for the king instructed all the wine stewards to serve each man what he wished. Esther 1:8*

## VASHTI REFUSED THE KING'S COMMAND

Traditions and customs were common in that part of the world, especially in palaces. Apparently, kings had a huge vessel on their table and for sport at a banquet they would compel some guest to drink all the strong drink in this huge vessel. This would provide entertainment for the guests if the person could stand up at all. Often the person passed out drunk and some even died.

Remember, this kingdom was made up of many conquered nations. For most of these nationalities, it was not permissible for them to eat or drink with the other nationalities whom they considered unclean. Remember, the point of this lavish festival was to impress not only the leaders, but, also, the common people who lived in Shushan. It would shock everyone that the king would give every person the choice of whether they drank at his banquet or not.

### **Esther 1:9-12 - Vashti Refused the King's Command**

The attempt to impress the people appears not yet complete. Banquets such as we have described were for men. Women were not usually invited. In fact, the queen was not invited.

*Queen Vashti also gave a banquet for the women in the royal palace of King Xerxes. Esther 1:9*

This was really unusual. They did not think it important to put on lavish feasts for women. Women were not important in their culture. It was not important to impress them. The text is not clear as to whether this was part of Xerxes plan or Vashti's little rebellion. If the latter were the case, then one should understand that there is already an undercurrent of tension between Vashti and the king. This would give a different light to the unpleasant episodes which followed. The text cannot help us in this search for understanding.

The text does not tell us how long Vashti's feast for the women lasted. It is not hard to understand that this feast could parallel that of the men.

The next verse seems inevitable.

*On the seventh day, when King Xerxes was in high spirits from wine, he commanded the seven eunuchs who served him -- Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar and Carcas --to bring before him Queen Vashti, wearing her royal crown, in order to display her beauty to the people and nobles, for she was lovely to look at. Esther 1:10, 11*

This was a kindly way to say that the king was drunk. Having participated in a lavish party on and off for a week, the king, and probably most of his guests, were quite drunk.

Notice the king sent his seven most trusted guards to bring Vashti to the feast. This means that while the king was very drunk, he had none of the most trusted guards with him. This was not done when the king was sober. It was not safe. Xerxes may have been the king, but there were several men who waited for an opportunity to kill the king and take control of the kingdom. It does not take seven guards to bring the queen.

At first glance, it appears that Vashti was being stubborn and rebellious. That is one possibility, but I believe there are two others:

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1. It was not in good taste, or morally appropriate for Vashti to be present at this drunken party, especially on the last day of the feast. In more sober times, the king would not issue such a command. It is possible that the queen was simply protecting her respectability.
2. It could be a response of fear. If she scheduled this party because the men were having a huge celebration and the women were not invited, then she might be fearing punishment for doing such a thing without permission.

Xerxes commanded the seven trusted guards to do two things:

1. Bring Queen Vashti to the banquet hall.
2. Make sure the Queen was wearing her crown when she comes to the festival. The second part of the command is helpful for our understanding. Today, the Queen of England wears her crown on certain official occasions only. Otherwise, she never wears it. It was true in that time as well. Whatever the king's intent, it was to be understood as an official appearance. We cannot be sure of Xerxes' motives because the text tells us what he wanted to do, but the "why" is not as clear. Conjecture is rampant.

The explanation of this varies from one scholar to another.

1. Some scholars suggest Xerxes wanted Vashti to wear the crown and nothing else at all. This was a design to show her total beauty.
2. Others suggest that Xerxes wanted Vashti to come to the banquet hall simply to show her beauty in a more acceptable way.
3. Some suggest she was commanded to come wearing her crown, so that she could be officially confronted concerning the banquet for women.

Because the text specifically mentioned Xerxes' desire to show her beauty, this must be at least part of the answer. Number two above appears to be the more plausible suggestion.

In the following verses, the queen responded to the command of the king.

*But when the attendants delivered the king's command, Queen Vashti refused to come. Then the king became furious and burned with anger. Esther 1:12*

The author's report of Vashti's response is strong. Most translations use the word "refused." The sense of the word is stronger than that. It means to "utterly refuse with no possible exception." Certainly Vashti knew that this was a dangerous response. At the same time, this was an unusual and demeaning command for the king to make. Vashti apparently chose between decency, on the one hand, and self worth on the other.

At the same time, there is another picture here. It is a picture of the moral climate of the kingdom. The king's values were so deteriorated that he was willing to subject his wife, the queen, to humiliating indecency for the entertainment of the men of his kingdom. The entire concept of a harem is evidence of degradation and moral debauchery.

The author indicated that Xerxes "became furious and burned with anger." The word translated "furious" is "qatseh" ( קִטְסֵה ) and suggests putting oneself into an uncontrollable



rage. The emphasis here is on self infliction of this condition. This is anger which is unnecessary and unbecoming a king. Anyone with nearly unlimited power does not need to be out of control with rage. He can deal with the problem by irreversible punishment.

The text also says that Xerxes "burned with anger." The word for burned is "bawer" (בָּעַר) which means "to eat up," "to totally consume." The word for "anger," on the other hand, is "chemah" (חֵמָה) and means "to stir oneself up to furious rage to the point that it poisons your outlook and personality." This word was sometimes used to describe poisonous snakebite. Interestingly enough, we now know that when we allow ourselves to be carried away with anger, we indeed poison our system and create conditions which will ultimately shorten life.

The author has used a well-worn writing tool here. He emphasized the extent of Xerxes' wrath by means of repetition. He stressed just how out of control Xerxes' fury really was.

### **Esther 1:13-22 - Ahasuerus/Xerxes Bans Vashti**

This paragraph describes Xerxes' dealing with the queen's refusal to obey his command.

*Since it was customary for the king to consult experts in matters of law and justice, he spoke with the wise men who understood the times Esther 1:13*

It may seem that Xerxes, having just thrown a temper-tantrum, suddenly acted with unusual poise and control. This is not really the case. Medo-Persia had the most highly developed legal code in the world of that day. In this profound legal system, the king had more power than anyone else, but he was not without restraints. One of these restrictions came into play here. There were many decisions the king was able to legally make on his own. If, however, the situation could or would involve a death sentence, then, it was necessary for him to consult with his seven chief advisors. The fact that he consulted these seven men would tell them immediately that he was minded to impose a very severe punishment on Vashti and possibly the death penalty.

The author identified each of the seven closest advisors to the throne. This would be like the Chief Consul to the American President.

*were closest to the king -- Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena and Memucan, the seven nobles of Persia and Media who had special access to the king and were highest in the kingdom. Esther 1:14*

Normally, an author would only indicate that the king consulted with his wise men. In the story of Joseph, Pharaoh had a dream. Notice how the author identified Pharaoh's advisors.

*And it came to pass in the morning that his spirit was troubled; and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt, and all the wise men thereof: and Pharaoh told them his dream; but there was none that could interpret them unto Pharaoh. Genesis 41:8*

The fact that the advisors are named suggests that there was real purpose in the naming of the seven men. The seven men were as follows:

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1. **Carshena** - This is an old Persian name and means "plowman." Being "the one next to the king," the author has indicated that he was second in command, at least at this time.
2. **Shethar** - This name is not Hebrew, neither is it Persian. We do not know much about him.
3. **Admatha** - This name probably means "earthly or dark colored." This could mean that he was dark skinned and came from northern Africa.
4. **Tarshish** - This is a Phoenician word which means "smelter, refiner." This probably suggests that this advisor came from the sea people who originated in Crete, but had migrated all over the Medo-Persian kingdom. Often, these people were pressed into service to oversee a king's foreign trade.
5. **Meres** - means "lofty." He was probably of Persian background. He was apparently from one of the top seven families in the kingdom. Normally the king would marry a daughter of one of these families.
6. **Marsena** - This name means "worthy." He, too, represents one of the leading families in the kingdom.
7. **Memucan** - His name means "dignified." He was apparently the spokesman for the group. He represented the leading family in the kingdom outside the king's own family.

The author described these men in two ways:

1. **"Who had special access to the king"** - Because of modern media, all of us wonder what it is like to be regularly in the presence of our president. There are many people who spend a lot of time with him every day. That is the kind of position these men had.
2. **They "were highest in the kingdom"** - This was a way of saying that these seven men were the highest ranking officials in the kingdom. No one held a more responsible position than these men.

Obviously, these two statements convey much the same message. This was a way to emphasize just how important these seven men were in the kingdom.

Having called together the seven next most powerful men in the kingdom, Xerxes asked them a very delicate question.

*"According to law, what must be done to Queen Vashti?" he asked. "She has not obeyed the command of King Xerxes that the eunuchs have taken to her." Esther 1:15*

This question was delicate because they were asked to stand in judgment of the queen. This was delicate for two reasons:

1. Vashti probably came from the family of one of these seven counselors. Though they were a counsel of seven, they were highly motivated political figures. To have the king married to a close relative gave one member of that counsel of seven unusual political leverage - they were family.

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2. They were asked to determine the punishment of the Queen. This was dangerous in two ways:
  - They were making life or death decisions about a woman whom the king loved and had chosen as his queen. He was angry at her now, but that could change. This could put them in a very compromising position if they gave the wrong advice.
  - They were passing judgment on the Queen. In many situations, she had more power and influence than they did. They knew it.

There is a clue here that these people knew very well. The very fact that Xerxes called upon them for advice told the seven counselors that the king had decided to impose the most severe punishment upon Vashti. The king had unlimited powers of judgment in certain areas. Anything more severe would require a consultation with the counsel. The seven had only to decide if they would give the king what he wanted.

Notice the question asked by Xerxes, "What shall we do unto Vashti according to the law..."

1. He did not ask if she was guilty. He had already decided that.
2. The basis of his question was the dictates of the Persian law. There was wide breadth of possibilities from what they suggested to the death penalty.
3. His report was very precise, "She has not obeyed the command of King Xerxes that the eunuchs have taken to her." Esther 1:15b

It should be noted that the counsel of seven and the "eunuchs" are two different groups. Those identified as "the eunuchs" were guards. The group of seven were advisors of the king.

The response from the Counsel of Princes was interesting.

*Then Memucan replied in the presence of the king and the nobles, "Queen Vashti has done wrong, not only against the king but also against all the nobles and the peoples of all the provinces of King Xerxes. Esther 1:16*

In any list of officials, they will be listed in the order of their importance. This means that Corshena was the second in command under the king. Memucan was mentioned last. This means that he was the least powerful and influential member of the counsel of princes. Interestingly enough, however, it was Memucan who spoke for the counsel. Unless requested to do so, this was not good protocol and others would react abrasively.

It is thought by some scholars that Memucan is the one later referred to as "Haman." The text does not say this, but it is possible.

When Memucan answered before the other princes and the king, he did not answer the question that Xerxes asked. The king was concerned with what the Persian law required concerning such deliberate rebellion. Memucan evaluated the affect of Vashti's actions upon the domestic relationships of the kingdom. He gave no legal opinion whatsoever. He rather pointed out the extended impact of Vashti's actions and their decisions concerning these actions. By doing this, Memucan forced the hand of the king. Every man in the

kingdom would support the king's firm action. Should the king fail to act decisively, no man would understand or accept it.

We should realize that masculine dominance was a top priority of their value system. This dominance must be maintained at any price. This is part of the support for the idea that Vashti's party for the women was a challenge to male dominance and power.

Memucan continued his report in the next verse.

*"For the queen's conduct will become known to all the women, and so they will despise their husbands and say, 'King Xerxes commanded Queen Vashti to be brought before him, but she would not come.'" Esther 1:17*

Memucan talked about Xerxes' popularity rating among the men of the kingdom. In effect, Memucan said the men would lose respect in their homes and Xerxes would be held responsible for this tragedy.

Again, Memucan continued his report in verse 18:

*This very day the Persian and Median women of the nobility who have heard about the queen's conduct will respond to all the king's nobles in the same way. There will be no end of disrespect and discord. Esther 1:18*

In verse 17, Memucan described the affects of Xerxes' possible inaction in general terms, as it affected the Medo-Persian kingdom. In this verse, he focused upon the affects of Xerxes' possible inaction upon the families of the princes themselves. The word "disrespect" is "bizzoyone" (בִּזְיוֹנֶה). It is used here and nowhere else in the Old Testament.

The word "discord" is "kehtsef" (כְּהִטְּפָה) and means "wrath." It is a strong word used to describe both the wrath of God and of man.

In this verse, Memucan made a strategic move: having described the painful consequences in detail, he, then, added the pressure of needed immediate action.

Memucan very carefully came to his recommendation:

*"Therefore, if it pleases the king, let him issue a royal decree and let it be written in the laws of Persia and Media, which cannot be repealed, that Vashti is never again to enter the presence of King Xerxes. Also let the king give her royal position to someone else who is better than she." Esther 1:19*

The recommendation comes in the form of a diplomatically worded conditional statement. This is identifiable by the "IF...THEN" format. He began with, "IF it please the king..." His priority, in presentation, was the pleasure of the king, not the law of the land. He could afford to do this because he had already presented convincing arguments for what he wanted Xerxes to do.

He finally presented his recommendation in these terms:

1. It should be in the form of a **royal commandment**. This suggests that the law which requires the king to consult the Counsel of Princes, before passing judgments with far reaching implications, be set aside, temporarily, for this particular decision.

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2. **It should be written among the laws of the Medes and the Persians.** This was important. If Xerxes simply passed the judgment, it would apply only to this one situation and would never be applicable again. If it is written among the laws of the Medes and the Persians, however, it can never be changed, altered or removed. It would be the law forever.
3. He did **NOT** recommend the death penalty. If it were anyone else it would have been death. Remember that Vashti was probably a relative of one of these seven men. It is entirely possible that it was Memucan to whom she was related.
4. Vashti will be forbidden forever from coming before the king. Observe also that at this point Memucan referred to the king's wife as "Vashti." In the past, she was referred to as "Queen Vashti," see 1:12, or "Vashti the queen," see 1:9. He was already dealing with her as a common citizen. If she could no longer come before the king, then there was little possibility that her beauty could cause the king to reconsider. If Xerxes ever reconsidered, these seven men would certainly die.
5. "Give her estate/position to another that is better than she." Memucan suggested that Vashti be removed from being queen. Though he didn't really say it, he was also suggesting that everything that she enjoyed because she was queen be removed as well.

Memucan threw caution to the wind when he said, "Give her estate to **another that is better than she...**" This was risky because, as we said earlier, one of the Counsel of seven Princes was related to Vashti. That prince would be most upset. Again, if the king did have a change of heart, he would certainly remember that Memucan thought that another woman was better than his wife.

When you look at this recommendation, it is clear that Memucan had included all the ingredients for dealing with the anger and frustration of the king.

Memucan continued his report by explaining the affect this will have on the wives throughout the kingdom.

*Then when the king's edict is proclaimed throughout all his vast realm, all the women will respect their husbands, from the least to the greatest." Esther 1:20*

Notice that Memucan speaks as though the decree had already been made. Memucan dealt with the nearly unmanageable size of the kingdom. Observe what he said, "When the king's decree which he shall make shall be published throughout all the kingdom, **(for it is great.)**" This is hard for us to imagine in our day of instant communication. It could take several months to get a message from Shushan to the extreme west end of the kingdom.

The concern, when this consultation first began, was that the Queen's example might encourage other wives to do the same kind of thing. Memucan assured the king that all the wives, the wives of commoners and leaders as well, might give respect to their husbands. He used the word "honor," which is "yekawr" (יְקָר). It is often translated "honor," but it is also used to describe "preciousness," "to hold in high esteem." This is a delicate way of saying that this news would frighten the women so that they will not try the same thing.

That culture had a system in which women were beholden to their husbands. They wanted to keep it that way.

The king responded to the recommendation in the following verse.

*The king and his nobles were pleased with this advice, so the king did as Memucan proposed. Esther 1:21*

Xerxes was "pleased." The word "pleased" is "yatab." (יָטַב) and is often translated "pleased." There is a more careful description. It is to be pleased to the point of being joyful and merry. Whether Memucan spoke only for himself or for all seven members of the Counsel of Princes, it was precisely what Xerxes wanted to hear.

Notice, also, that the proposal of Memucan was as pleasing to the princes as it was to the king. We do not know how to account for this. Our confusion hinges on the problem of whether Memucan spoke out of turn or whether he was the spokesman for the Counsel of Princes.

We have to remind ourselves that though we have instant communications, they did not. This was a huge empire. It took several months to send a message from Shushan to the extreme western provinces. Having convinced the king to punish Vashti, Memucan then moved to do the necessary follow-up work.

*He sent dispatches to all parts of the kingdom, to each province in its own script and to each people in its own language, proclaiming in each people's tongue that every man should be ruler over his own household. Esther 1:22*

The king sent letters into each of the 127 provinces of the Persian Empire. Observe that these letters were each written in the language of the people living in that province. The Near East was a lot like Eastern Europe today. In any of these countries there are several ethnic groups living in ethnic enclaves within the country. The former Yugoslavia is a case in point.

There is an additional ingredient in the Medo-Persian empire. Many wars were fought and won. The people of the conquered nations were taken as slaves into the Persian empire. These slaves were settled in a given province and became servants there. Within the Persian province, the slaves lived in their own communities and the head of government there was one of the ethnic group. The reason for making a captive their ruler was that if an uprising took place, they were revolting against one of their own. With such a huge empire, encompassing so many enslaved nations, relative peace was absolutely essential in the realm.

Xerxes worked hard to maintain this peaceful atmosphere. One expression of this was that each national or cultural group was allowed to keep their own language. This is the reason the author said in this verse, "To every people after their language."

We must hasten to clarify that though this was true of every other conquered people, it was not true for Israel. The Jewish people were spread out over all the provinces. As the Romans would learn later, this was the only way Jewish people could be controlled.

The message Xerxes sent would seem absurd in our culture, but only strange to those who received it. He said, "Every man should bear rule in his own house." The word

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"rule" is "sarar" (שָׂרַר) and means "to bear rule," "to be governor," "to exercise dominion." It was an important announcement in view of recent events in Shushan. Doubtless, the letter also contained a report of Vashti's actions and punishment. This along with the king's edict would have a frightening effect upon the women of the provinces. Now, if they disobeyed their husband, they faced not only his wrath, but that of the king.

There is considerable disagreement about the conclusion of the chapter. The closing words are, "and should speak according to the language of his people." Because many conquered countries were enslaved within the Persian Empire, there was a considerable amount of intermarriage. A primary expression of the paternal household rule was the pronouncement that only the language of the head of the house was to be spoken in his home. This would accomplish two things:

1. It would support male dominance in the homes of these slaves from other nations. This was important to the king and the counsel.
2. While bolstering the position of the men, it also went a long way toward creating good will between the king and slaves over the language issue. In history, many subsequent nations have ignored this fact, to their detriment.

### **Messages about God in Chapter One**

1. Pagan king conquered Israel and took them out of the land after God gave them the land. Watch for this.
2. Debauchery always leads to judgment.
3. Some scholars say Vashti was angry because Xerxes enabled Jews to refurbish Jerusalem. God judged her.
4. The removal of the Queen opened the way to honor Esther for her obedience and thus prepare the way to deliver Israel - it shows God's power, faithfulness and mercy.
5. God is faithful, even when it appears He has forgotten.





## QUESTIONS FOR ESTHER LESSON 2

### ESTHER 2:1 - 23

#### ESTHER BECAME QUEEN

1. There are six paragraphs in Esther chapter two. On the following table, write a summary of seven words or less, for each paragraph.

2:1-4	
2:5-7	
2:8-11	
2:12-15	
2:16-18	
2:19-23	

2. In 2:1-4, the search for a new queen began.
  - a. In 2:1, the author gave an inkling of the king's emotional response to the situation with Vashti.
    - (1). What was that response?
    - (2). How would you describe that response?
  - b. In 2:2, the advisors to the king made an unusual suggestion. What was the suggestion? Why would this be a good way to find a queen?
  - c. In 2:3, 4, the plan was detailed for the king. Setting aside our outrage at such a system, if you were one of these young women, in that cultural setting, how would you feel about this?
3. In Esther 2:5-7, there is a brief parenthesis about Mordecai and Esther and their relationships within the family.
  - a. In 2:5, 6, the author gave some detailed information about Mordecai.
    - (1). What information did he give?
    - (2). What did you learn from this information?
  - b. Think carefully about the author's statements about Esther in 2:7.
    - (1). What does it tell you about Esther?
    - (2). What does this tell you about Esther's family?
4. In Esther 2:5-8, the author described Esther's entrance into the harem of Xerxes.
  - a. In 2:8, 9, the author described the process by which the women were chosen to be presented to the king.
    - (1). How would you describe this process of choice?
    - (2). 2:9 describes how Esther was treated. What special attention did she receive? Why?
  - b. In 2:10, there is an aside which tells us something of Esther's relationship with Mordecai. What does it tell us?

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- c. In 2:11, the author tells us something of Mordecai's relationship with Esther. What did you learn about this relationship?
- 5. In Esther 2:12-15, the author described Esther's preparation to be presented to the king.
  - a. In 2:12, the author gave more information about the preparation process.
    - (1). What did he tell us?
    - (2). Why would this be important?
  - b. In 2:13, a special privilege was described for each young woman.
    - (1). What was it?
    - (2). Why would this be a special privilege?
  - c. In 2:14, the author identified one of the cold realities of harem life.
    - (1). How would you describe it in your own words?
    - (2). Set aside your prejudices for a moment and try to think as these young women thought. What would have gone through your mind in this situation?
  - d. In 2:15, the author described that day when Esther was to be presented to the king.
    - (1). How did the author identify Esther here? Why?
    - (2). What does he say about Esther?
    - (3). What do we learn from this?
- 6. In Esther 2:16 - 18, Esther was crowned as queen.
  - a. In 2:16, the author identified the time when these events took place.
    - (1). What information does he give us?
    - (2). What can we learn from this report of the time?
  - b. In 2:17, the author reported the choice of Esther by Xerxes.
    - (1). Read the verse carefully. What pieces of information does the author give us?
    - (2). What did you learn?
  - c. The author described Esther's coronation in 2:18.
    - (1). Record each piece of information in the verse.
    - (2). Study the list. How was life in Medo-Persia changed for this brief time?
- 7. In Esther 2:19-23, the author described a brave deed on the part of Mordecai.
  - a. In 2:19, the author wrote of Mordecai. Read the verse again, carefully.
    - (1). What does this reference to Mordecai tell us?
    - (2). What difference would this make?
  - b. In 2:20, the author described Esther's relationship to Mordecai now that she is the queen.
    - (1). What is that relationship?
    - (2). How is that important to the story?
  - c. In 2:21, 22, the scene shifts to an all too common experience in the life of kings.
    - (1). What did the author describe?
    - (2). How did Mordecai respond?
    - (3). What are the implications of Mordecai's actions?
    - (4). Why would Mordecai choose to report the incident in the way he did?
  - d. In 2:23, there is a description of the official response to Mordecai's revelation.
    - (1). How did the king respond?
    - (2). What did the king fail to do?

## QUESTIONS FOR ESTHER LESSON 2

8. Review the chapter again. What do you discover concerning the action of God in this book, though His name does not appear in the book ?



## LESSON 2: – ESTHER 2:1 – 23

### ESTHER BECAME QUEEN

There are six paragraphs in Esther chapter two. A brief summary of each paragraph appears on the table which follows:

2:1-4	A Plan Developed to Replace Vashti
2:5-7	Mordecai Takes Esther as His Daughter
2:8-11	Esther Taken Into the House of Women
2:12-15	Esther Prepared to Meet the King
2:16-18	Esther Becomes Queen
2:19-23	Mordecai Foils Plot Against Xerxes

As you look over this list of titles, one thing stands out - the chapter leads up to the crowning of Esther and then changes abruptly. The final paragraph deals with Mordecai, not Esther. This paragraph deals with a threat and tragedy where previous paragraphs dealt with joy and success.

#### **Esther 2:1-4 - The Search for a New Queen**

This chapter immediately follows a very traumatic time in the life of Xerxes. There was usually someone who wanted to confront a monarch hoping to take his place. It was not common for the king to be challenged by his own wife. Xerxes had loved Vashti. These events were a confusion of emotions for him. He loved her deeply. He was bitterly angry with her for the stand she took against him. When the edict had been carried out, which may have been her death, and Vashti was gone, there was a time of withdrawal and uneasiness. This is an awkward and dangerous time in any kingdom. When the king is happy, everyone knows what to expect. When the king is morose, sad and withdrawn, most anything can happen. This would make everyone in the court uneasy and tense.

It is at this point that we come to chapter two. It sounds as though Xerxes had forgotten. It is clear that his anger was fierce and enduring, even when he was sober. There appears to be an awkward space of time between chapters one and two.

*Later when the anger of King Xerxes had subsided, he remembered Vashti and what she had done and what he had decreed about her. Esther 2:1*

In this verse, you get contrasting pictures of Xerxes. The author first told us that "the anger of king Ahasuerus had subsided." One might say he was learning to live with his grief and loss.

In the very next phrase, however, the author said, "he remembered Vashti." There is suspense in this phrase. We are forced to ask, "How did Xerxes remember Vashti?" The next phrase offers some help. The author continued, "...what she had done and what was decreed against her." Xerxes was pacified to some extent. At the same time there was frustration and anger. The author wrote about "what was decreed against her." He never

told us, however, what that was. It is safe to assume that she was removed from the court and stripped of her wealth of belongings and properties. It appears there had to be more. A number of scholars, Jews among them, believe she was put to death. This was a common punishment for people who disobeyed the king. Kings usually did away with opponents lest they return to threaten them again. This situation fits that scenario. The truth is that we do not know what happened to her.

Verses 2-4a form a single sentence. We will deal with each verse separately

*Then the king's personal attendants proposed, "Let a search be made for beautiful young virgins for the king. Esther 2:2*

This verse speaks of "the king's personal attendants. We would understand this to be his personal guards. They would spend more time with the king than anyone else. These ministering servants suggested that they find a new queen. Observe that the idea of a new queen was not mentioned. The author simply talked about finding virgins for the king. This gives an idea of their outlook about women and about the kings.

*Let the king appoint commissioners in every province of his realm to bring all these beautiful girls into the harem at the citadel of Susa. Let them be placed under the care of Hegai, the king's eunuch, who is in charge of the women; and let beauty treatments be given to them. Then let the girl who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti." This advice appealed to the king, and he followed it. Esther 2:3, 4*

The most beautiful young women from all 127 provinces were brought to Susa, the palace. They were placed in the custody of Hegai, the Eunuch, the keeper of the women (harem). There were two parts to the harem:

- Those virgins who had not spent the night with the king.
- Those women who had spent the night with the king and would not leave the palace or see him again unless they really pleased him.

This is very offensive to us, but in their fertility cult worship, this was normal. This gives us an insight into why Solomon had so many concubines. Part of his problem was that he had adopted the ways of the pagan kings.

These young women were given costly ointments to prepare themselves for presentation before the king. It was suggested to Xerxes that out of the most beautiful young women from 127 provinces, he should choose one, and she would be the queen.

Xerxes was pleased with this plan and, it was set in motion.

#### **Esther 2:5-7 - Mordecai Takes Esther as His Daughter.**

Mordecai lived in Shushan. Notice what the text says about Mordecai:

*Now there was in the citadel of Susa a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, named Mordecai son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, who had been carried into exile from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, among those taken captive with Jehoiachin king of Judah. Esther 2:5, 6*

## ESTHER BECAME QUEEN

Mordecai was the son of Jair who was a Benjamite. He was the grandson of Shimei, but there were 16 people by that name in the Bible. Mordecai was also the great-grandson of Kish, who lived in Jerusalem. Mordecai was carried away captive under Jeconiah (Jehoiachin) king of Judah, by Nebuchadnezzar. This means that Mordecai had been in Medo-Persia for many years. During that time, he was faithfully building a very positive reputation.

It is not accidental that Mordecai was brought to Shushan as a high governmental official. This means that he showed great promise as a leader. His captors saw great potential for leadership in this captive. It is a situation much like Daniel.

*Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah, whom he had brought up because she had neither father nor mother. This girl, who was also known as Esther, was lovely in form and features, and Mordecai had taken her as his own daughter when her father and mother died. Esther 2:7*

There are some pieces of information in the text about Esther:

- Her real name was Hadassah - Myrtle.
- Esther was her Persian name - after Ashtarte - Goddess of love, fertility. This probably says something about her beauty.
- Her father was Abihail - He also was a Benjamite.
- She had neither father or mother - They may have died in the conquest that conquered Jerusalem.
- She was orphaned - both parents died. She was raised by her cousin - Mordecai.
- Mordecai took her as his own daughter - he adopted her. This means that her father's brothers were either all dead or refused to care for her. Otherwise, it would not be permissible under Hebrew law for her to be raised by Mordecai.

### **Esther 2:8-11 - Esther Taken into the House of Women**

The plan to find a new queen was enacted throughout the entire realm.

*When the king's order and edict had been proclaimed, many girls were brought to the citadel of Susa and put under the care of Hegai. Esther also was taken to the king's palace and entrusted to Hegai, who had charge of the harem. Esther 2:8*

We do not know how the choices were made, but Esther was one of the beautiful young virgins who were chosen. Like the other young maidens, she was placed in the care of the king's eunuch, Hegai, the keeper of the house of the women. The text gives us no information about how many young ladies were brought into the harem.

It is not a surprise that Esther fared well during the time of her preparation.

*The girl pleased him and won his favor. Immediately he provided her with her beauty treatments and special food. He assigned to her seven maids selected from the king's palace and moved her and her maids into the best place in the harem. Esther 2:9*

Again, we do not know why, but we are told that Esther pleased Hegai. Because of this, he saw to it that she had the best quarters in the harem. Apparently all the virgins were provided servants. The fact that the text mentions that she had seven may suggest that she had more and better servants than the others received. Her servants were selected from the king's palace - the very best. The text also indicates that she received her beauty treatments before others did. She also received special food.

*Esther had not revealed her nationality and family background, because Mordecai had forbidden her to do so. Esther 2:10*

Verse ten comes as an aside. While all these exciting things were happening to her, Esther carefully guarded her secret identity. It is not clear how she was able to maintain her secret. One wonders how Esther and Mordecai could hide their national identity when each group usually wore distinctive clothing. There are a few possibilities:

1. When these people came to Medo-Persia, many years before, from Jerusalem, they came as slaves. As slaves, they would be deprived of their distinctive dress. Also, these people had been in Medo-Persia for many years. Their national garb would wear out and they would be unable to replace it as slaves.
2. They came as slaves, but Mordecai became a governmental official. He and his family would wear clothing appropriate to his position in the government.

I suspect that both of these scenarios came into play in their lives.

A woman was under the control of her father or family member until she married or was taken as a slave. At that point, her allegiance shifted to her husband or to the one who had claimed her. In this instance, it was the king. Esther was no longer under the care and control of Mordecai, but she still obeyed his instructions. This gives us an indication of her character. She was not driving to control her own life. Mordecai had taught her that it was dangerous to identify your Jewish background. Jews were abused captives. To identify yourself was to invite pain and suffering. Certainly, the pressures in the harem to tell people about herself were high, but she maintained her silence.

It might have worked in her favor to hint that she was related to a rising political figure, but she never did. All of this tells us something good about her character.

*Every day he walked back and forth near the courtyard of the harem to find out how Esther was and what was happening to her. Esther 2:11*

Mordecai was not Esther's father and he had no formal responsibility for her care. Nevertheless, he dealt with her as though she was his own daughter. He could have used his influence to try to gain advantage for Esther. He was strong enough to avoid this altogether. Mordecai just had a deep family concern for his cousin and cared enough to discreetly check on her every day. This tells us some things about Mordecai. These were difficult times for Jewish people. They had so much to watch out for that they hardly had time to show concern for others. Mordecai, in the midst of the difficulties he encountered as a Jew and as a government leader, took the time to care; to watch over his cousin as if she were his own daughter.



### Esther 2:12-15 - Esther Prepared to Meet the King

The author, then, turned to the situation Esther faced in the house of the women.

*Before a girl's turn came to go in to King Xerxes, she had to complete twelve months of beauty treatments prescribed for the women, six months with oil of myrrh and six with perfumes and cosmetics. Esther 2:12*

There was a complete ritual through which each of the hundreds of young women went in her effort to become the queen. The entire process took over a year. It involved training in the way one conducts themselves in the royal palace and in the presence of the king.

Special beauty treatments were given to each young lady so that she would be at her very best when presented to the king. As each young lady completed this lengthy time of preparation, everything possible had been done to make her presentable to the king.

No attempt was made to move Esther to the front of the line so that she could get ahead of others who might make a more favorable impression on the king. She would go to the king in the proper time and order.

The author continued with his description of this process.

*And this is how she would go to the king: Anything she wanted was given her to take with her from the harem to the king's palace. Esther 2:13*

It is obvious that they wanted to prepare the young woman as completely as possible for her meeting with the king. They also wished to help the young woman be as comfortable as possible and at ease about the thoroughness of her preparation. If there was a particular piece of clothing that would accent her beauty, she was allowed to take it with her to the palace. This was her one opportunity and they wanted her to make the most of it.

The author then gave a general description of the schedule for the special day for each young woman.

*In the evening she would go there and in the morning return to another part of the harem to the care of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the concubines. She would not return to the king unless he was pleased with her and summoned her by name. Esther 2:14*

This whole procedure is a distress to us. For us, this is not only immoral, it is demeaning. It is treating beautiful young women like property, like animals. It really was. In that culture, it was viewed differently. It was an honor to be chosen as the king's concubine, much less his queen. We can never accept this, but in order to understand Esther's situation, we need to attempt to see the situation as she viewed it.

Having spent the night with the king, the young woman would now be his concubine. She could never be the wife of any other man. She would stay in the harem, but unless the king called for her by name, she would never again go to spend time with him or any other man.

There were two parts to the "house of the women" - The part for the women who had not yet spent the night with the king and the part for the concubines who may have become pregnant by the king and were rearing his child.

## STANDING ALONE, BUT NEVER LONELY

The part of the house reserved for the concubines was under the direction of a guard, an eunuch by the name of Shaashgaz. He was apparently of Persian parentage.

Having described the situation through which each of these young women would go, the author then turns his attention to Esther.

*When the turn came for Esther (the girl Mordecai had adopted, the daughter of his uncle Abihail) to go to the king, she asked for nothing other than what Hegai, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the harem, suggested. And Esther won the favor of everyone who saw her. Esther 2:15*

The author carefully identified Esther. This is interesting, since she has been identified in this way repeatedly throughout the story. This, of course, is a matter of emphasis.

1. **She was the daughter of Abihail** - The identification of Esther's father had nothing to do with the story. It was a way of stressing that she was a Jewish girl who in spite of that fact was in the running to be the queen of Persia. This would be shocking to anyone, in that day, who read the account.
2. **Mordecai took Esther as his daughter** - This fact accomplished three things:
  - a. It emphasized the godly character of Mordecai in going far beyond what was required of him as a member of the family.
  - b. It stressed the fact, again, that Esther was really a Jew.
  - c. It described something good about the kind of family out of which Esther came.

The author told us something about Esther herself:

1. **She had inner strength** - She did not require anything to enhance her beauty. She rather wore what the king's eunuch, Hegai, appointed her to wear.
2. **Her reputation increased** - Everyone who saw her increasingly favored her. Women in the harem were extremely jealous of each other. Still, she enjoyed the increasingly favorable impression of all who saw her. This was also true in the palace itself.

### Esther 2:16-18 - Esther Became Queen

*She was taken to King Xerxes in the royal residence in the tenth month, the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign. Esther 2:16*

The author gave us a date which helps us understand the timetable of the story. It was the tenth month - Tebeth. This roughly parallels mid-December to mid-January on our calendar.

The author further indicated that this was the seventh year of Xerxes' reign. This also means that it has been four years since Vashti was deposed; four years when Persia was without a queen; four years when the king did not have a royal son. He probably had many sons by his concubines, but they did not count as heirs to the throne. This would make the people uneasy, uncertain about the future of the reign of Xerxes.

## ESTHER BECAME QUEEN

The fact that so much time had elapsed suggests that Esther did not receive preferential treatment to move the time of her presentation ahead of many others who also wanted to be the queen.

*Now the king was attracted to Esther more than to any of the other women, and she won his favor and approval more than any of the other virgins. So he set a royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti. Esther 2:17*

The author reported that Xerxes loved Esther, “More than any of the other women.” This is further evidence that a number of the virgins had been presented to the king before he met Esther. There was no preferential treatment.

The Hebrew word for “approval” is “khane” ( חָנַן ) and means “graciousness,” “kindness,” “to be precious.” These are very endearing terms.

The word “favor” is “kehse” ( חֶסֶד ). It is the root of the word “mercy,” “kindness,” “piety,” “beauty.” This is far more than physical beauty. The author has used several means to tell us that Esther was favored more and more by all those around her.

A potential problem looms. Though the plan was that the king was to choose his queen from among the beautiful young women of the empire, there was a custom that the king chose the queen from among the families of the seven princes. There are several explanations for this situation:

1. The unacceptable conduct of Vashti gave Xerxes great freedom in choosing his queen without interference from the princes.
2. It could be that they simply made an exception.
3. It is possible that there was not an acceptable candidate among the seven families.

Because the suggestion for choosing the queen probably came from the princes, it is possible that they were prepared to make such an exception.

The king placed the royal crown upon Esther’s head. In so doing, he proclaimed her queen of the realm. Imagine it, Esther, a Jewish girl now queen of Medo-Persia an arch-enemy of her people.

Notice how the author recorded the event, “...and made her queen **instead of Vashti...**” We must ask ourselves what he meant when he said, “instead of Vashti”? It could be that he simply meant that now there was a queen when for four years there had been none. It could also mean that though Vashti had been deposed, and perhaps put to death, the new queen was considered to be taking the position from her.

Now the author described the festivities which followed the crowning ceremonies.

*And the king gave a great banquet, Esther's banquet, for all his nobles and officials. He proclaimed a holiday throughout the provinces and distributed gifts with royal liberality. Esther 2:18*

It was the king who put on the banquet, though the author quickly added that this was “Esther’s banquet.” This was a huge party for all the king’s nobles and officials. Because of the nature of the feast, Esther was present. Though the text does not indicate so, it appears that both Esther and the wives of the long list of dignitaries would also be present.

This was a very special occasion. The king had affirmed this by the banquet he hosted to present the queen. This was further announced by the king's presentation of gifts to his guests.

None of this, however, touched the lives of the other people of the kingdom. In a very rare situation, the king declared a holiday throughout the provinces. Holidays were usually reserved for the citizens of the empire. On this occasion, even the slaves were the recipients of the king's generosity.

**Esther 2:19-23 - Mordecai Foils Plot Against Xerxes.**

*When the virgins were assembled a second time, Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate. Esther 2:19*

The fact that Mordecai was at the king's gate says that he was still a governmental official in his former capacity. Mordecai did not receive an immediate promotion just because he was related to the queen. In fact, it appears that it was not yet known that they were related.

Even though Esther was the queen, Mordecai treated her like his daughter and she responded in a similar fashion.

*But Esther had kept secret her family background and nationality just as Mordecai had told her to do, for she continued to follow Mordecai's instructions as she had done when he was bringing her up. Esther 2:20*

Esther did more than would be expected of a woman in her position. A woman was expected to obey her father up until she was married. At that point, she came under the care of her husband and she was required to do his bidding. Though she was the queen, Esther still did what Mordecai told her to do.

The author reported that Esther had still not identified her nationality, as Mordecai instructed.

She kept Mordecai's instructions as she had when she was a little girl.

*During the time Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's officers who guarded the doorway, became angry and conspired to assassinate King Xerxes. Esther 2:21*

The fact that he was sitting in the king's gate means that he was an official of government. This is surprising since it was clear that he was a Jew.

Two guards were in a perfect position to attack the king without being noticed. The text says that they were angry, but it does not give any indication concerning what was the source of their anger.

- They sought to lay hands upon the king - to do him harm.
- The fact that Mordecai told the king, says that Mordecai was very loyal to the king. This was highly unusual in view of the way the king had treated the Jews. This tells us something about the character of Mordecai.
- This should have made him several enemies.

## ESTHER BECAME QUEEN

*But Mordecai found out about the plot and told Queen Esther, who in turn reported it to the king, giving credit to Mordecai. Esther 2:22*

Mordecai discovered the attempt. The author does not tell us how Mordecai came into possession of this information. It may have had something to do with the king's action, or lack of actions against the Jews.

- He told Esther.
- Esther told the king and told him the source of the information.
- Such a person would undoubtedly be given a very high post in government. That, of course did not happen. We are not privileged to know why that was the case.

The king investigated the information and found it to be true.

*And when the report was investigated and found to be true, the two officials were hanged on a gallows. All this was recorded in the book of the annals in the presence of the king. Esther 2:23*

Treason was always dealt with in the same way - the most painful way of dying. The text tells us that they were "hanged on the gallows." This was probably crucifixion. The author also tells us that they recorded the incident in the book of the Chronicles of the king. Every king kept such a book. We know that these existed, but we do not have a copy of this one at all. If we had this, it would fill in a lot of information that is now missing.

One of those startling pieces of information has to do with Mordecai. He learned of the plot to kill the king. At great personal risk, he made this information known to the king. The report was found to be true. Mordecai literally saved the life of the king. The startling information is that there is no mention of the king's gratitude to Mordecai for what he had done. This kind of loyalty was always rewarded with gifts and promotions. There is no mention of anything of this sort in the text. There had to be some kind of foul play in order for this to be overlooked. We will refer to this situation later on in our study.

### **Messages about God in Chapter Two**

1. It is not accidental that Mordecai, a Jew, was brought to Shushan as a governmental official in high office. In many places throughout Scripture, God gave people honor before others in order to place them where they could be a part of accomplishing His design for His people. This is what happened to Joseph.
2. God used the absence of immediate family to place Esther in the place where she could be a part of accomplishing His will. Again, this was the experience of Joseph.
3. Esther's character won her a place of respect among court officials. This is not coincidental.
4. God placed Esther in a position where she could appeal to the king and become queen of Medo-Persia though she was a Jew.
5. It was not accidental that Mordecai discovered the plot to kill the king. His character enabled him to take the great risk of revealing this to the king.



## QUESTIONS FOR ESTHER LESSON 3

### ESTHER 3:1 - 15

#### HAMAN GOT XERXES TO DECREE DEATH TO JEWS

1. There are three paragraphs in Esther chapter three. On the following table, write a summary of seven words or less for each paragraph.

3:1-6	
3:7-11	
3:12-15	

2. In Esther 3:1-6, the author described Mordecai's refusal to honor Haman.
- In 3:1, Xerxes honored Haman above all other leaders of the empire. On the basis of the previous chapter, what was the basis for this honor?
  - In 3:2, the author described the honor Haman received from officials.
    - Why would the king decree that everyone in the empire bow down to Haman?
    - Notice the contrast in the verse.
      - What is the contrast?
      - How can we explain this contrast?
      - What does this situation say about Mordecai?
  - In 3:3, the other officials complained to Mordecai.
    - What was their complaint?
    - What did they NOT complain about?
    - What was the basis of their complaint?
  - In 3:4, the minor authorities of the empire continue to badger Mordecai.
    - What was their complaint?
    - Why would Mordecai refuse to comply?
    - Why did the minor officials go to Haman?
    - What was their presentation to Haman?
  - In 3:5, Haman checked out the complaint of the officials.
    - Read the verse carefully. From the way it is written, what does it tell you about previous situations?
    - What does this verse tell you about Mordecai?
    - What does this verse tell you about Haman?
  - In 3:6, there is an insight into the workings of Haman's mind. What do you see?
    - What options did Haman consider?
    - On what basis did he make his choice?
3. In Esther 3:7-11, Haman set about to deceive Xerxes concerning the Jews.
- In 3:7, Haman used the Pur.
    - What is the Pur?
    - Why was Haman using it?
    - What does this tell you about Haman?
    - What were the consequences of this procedure?

## STANDING ALONE, BUT NEVER LONELY

- b. In 3:8, Haman approached Xerxes concerning the Jews.
    - (1). What did Haman do?
    - (2). What did Haman recommend?
    - (3). What did you learn about Haman from this verse?
  - c. In 3:9, Haman made an offer to the king.
    - (1). What was Haman's offer?
    - (2). What incentive did Haman offer?
    - (3). What reason did Haman offer for the incentive?
  - d. In 3:10, the king responded to Haman's offer.
    - (1). What was Xerxes' response?
    - (2). What implications can you draw from this response?
    - (3). What was the meaning of this response?
    - (4). The author identified Haman, in this verse, as he had several times before. Why?
  - e. In 3:11, Xerxes continued his response to Haman.
    - (1). What did he say?
    - (2). What can we learn from this statement?
4. In Esther 3:12-15, Haman issued the letters to kill the Jews.
- a. In 3:12, Haman began carrying out the king's instructions.
    - (1). Why did the author tell us that it was written in the languages of each people?
    - (2). Why did the author tell us that it was written in the king's name and sealed with his seal?
  - b. In 3:13, the author identifies the content of the letters.
    - (1). What were the instructions?
    - (2). When was this to happen? Why was so much time given before the date?
  - c. In 3:14, the author indicated who received the letter.
    - (1). Who were the recipients?
    - (2). Why was it given to so many people?
    - (3). Haman could have made this a military operation, exclusively. Why didn't he?
  - d. In 3:15, there is a serious contrast.
    - (1) What two things were contrasted?
    - (2). Explain what the author meant by his statement in this verse?
5. Read the chapter again. Where do you see the actions of God in this chapter?



## LESSON 3: – ESTHER 3:1 – 15

### HAMAN GOT XERXES TO DECREE DEATH TO JEWS

#### Introduction

There are three paragraphs in Esther chapter three. A summary of each paragraph is reported on the table which follows:

3:1-6	Mordecai Refused to Honor Haman
3:7-11	Haman Deceives Xerxes About the Jews
3:12-15	Haman Issued Letter to Provinces - Kill All Jews

We should observe that Haman had manipulated the king so as to gain power to exterminate the Jews. Though the king was not sympathetic to the Jews, he did not know what Haman was doing.

#### Esther 3:1-6 - Mordecai Refused to Honor Haman

If you read the first paragraph of chapter three in light of the end of chapter two, you can sense the motive of Haman's actions.

*After these events, King Xerxes honored Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, elevating him and giving him a seat of honor higher than that of all the other nobles. Esther 3:1*

Esther had become queen and in the name of Mordecai she had protected the king from assassination. It is natural that he would fear that the Jews would gain power at his own expense.

Haman was the son of an Agagite. Agagites were also called Amalekites, who had always been archenemies of the Jews. Haman would have had a natural animosity for the Jewish people along with the politically correct rejection of them under this king.

Xerxes was grateful for the apparently thoughtful thing which Haman had brought to his attention. It did not dawn on the king that this might be a way for Haman to manipulate him.

We must remember that the thing which Haman brought to Xerxes attention was not true. Nothing of this nature was planned. It was true that the Jews had different laws. It was also true that Mordecai refused to bow down to Haman when the King had commanded that people do this. It was not true that the Jews were out to overthrow the king. That was not a thing of distress to Haman. To tell a lie was, in his thinking, sometimes necessary in order to accomplish the goals of the government.

Xerxes was so grateful that he did a most unusual thing. It was common to reward people who demonstrated their loyalty. In this instance, Xerxes placed Haman in the second most powerful position in the government. The surprise of this is that he was given a place above all of the princes of the royal family. That was unusual to say the least. Now, only Xerxes was more powerful than Haman.

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There is an interesting contrast in the following verse.

*All the royal officials at the king's gate knelt down and paid honor to Haman, for the king had commanded this concerning him. But Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor. Esther 3:2*

Because the second most powerful person in the kingdom usually acted on behalf of the king, there was always a royal command that this person receive the same deference and respect offered to the king himself. This verse indicates that the servants and all the government officials, people in the gate, bowed down before Haman and gave him respect. There is a contrast here, however. Though all the other officials bowed down before Haman, Mordecai would not do so. The author did not give us any information about why this was true. Did Mordecai know things about Haman that others did not know? Did Mordecai refuse because he felt Jews should not bow down to anyone else? The text is silent about this.

In taking this stand, Mordecai risked wrath in three directions:

- He risked the wrath of the king. Xerxes had commanded that everyone give Haman reverence.
- He risked and received the wrath of Haman himself. Haman was a proud man.
- He risked the wrath of other governmental officials who had to bow down, but he would not do so.

None of these things had any effect upon the conduct of Mordecai. For whatever reason, he determined not to bow down to Haman under any circumstances.

It was not surprising that the other governmental officials, those in the gate, were disturbed by Mordecai's actions.

*Then the royal officials at the king's gate asked Mordecai, "Why do you disobey the king's command?" Esther 3:3*

The other officials were disturbed that they had to bow down, but Mordecai would not do so. It would be normal for them to inquire concerning why he would disobey the law of the king. There is another consideration. Governmental officials in most any country are very jealous of each other. They were always watching to see if anyone got privileges that they did not receive. It would appear to them as though this was the case with Mordecai. Notice the direction of their accusation. They accused him of disobeying the king, not of refusing to give honor to Haman. To disobey the king meant instant death and everyone knew it. Though they worked with Mordecai, there was no love lost between them. They would gladly turn him in for the slightest infraction of the laws of the land.

Having failed to get Mordecai to do as they had to do, the other officials took the next step.

*Day after day they spoke to him but he refused to comply. Therefore they told Haman about it to see whether Mordecai's behavior would be tolerated, for he had told them he was a Jew. Esther 3:4*

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Notice that their question of Mordecai was not an isolated incident. They asked him the same questions day after day. This was a way of intensifying the pressure on Mordecai.

Having failed to get Mordecai to change, the other governmental officials, then, went to Haman himself. As any good politician would do, they did not accuse Mordecai. They simply asked Haman concerning what they had seen and he had observed it as well. The appeal was a matter of curiosity rather than trying to make trouble for Mordecai. No matter how they presented it, it was clear to Haman and everyone else that they were going to make trouble for Mordecai if they could. Their announced purpose was, “to see if the words of Mordecai would stand.”

Notice that the author said, “For he had told them that he was a Jew.” The word “for” suggests that a reason is coming. The reason that they wanted to see if Mordecai’s word would stand was that they knew that he was a Jew. There is animosity here. This was especially true since they had not known his background. It was not certain if Haman knew it. The motives of the other officials were clear. They were going to make trouble for a Jew.

The problem for Haman was now compounded.

*When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor, he was enraged. Esther 3:5*

Haman was angry because Mordecai did not bow and give him reverence. This suggests that one of the major priorities of Haman’s life was his pride in position. This by itself would have been a driving force in his thinking. Add to this that the other officials were also aware of this problem. This would put pressure on Haman. If he allowed one official, and that one a Jew, to fail to bow down, then the others would have no reason to give him unusual respect either. Suddenly, the thing most important in his life would fade completely.

The author said, “Haman was full of wrath.” The word “wrath” is “khaymah” (חַמָּה) and means “to be poisoned with rage,” “to be furious with indignation,” “to be filled with hot displeasure.” The author said that Haman was running over with rage. This is a level of fury that is not easily calmed. In this frame of mind, people are apt to do something unreasonable.

The author continued his description of Haman’s fury.

*Yet having learned who Mordecai's people were, he scorned the idea of killing only Mordecai. Instead Haman looked for a way to destroy all Mordecai's people, the Jews, throughout the whole kingdom of Xerxes. Esther 3:6*

This is a glimpse into the mind of a bitter man. He would have enjoyed doing violence to Mordecai, but he wanted more revenge than that. Discovering that Mordecai was a Jew, gave Haman an idea. He could use this as a way to get rid of not only Mordecai, but also every Jewish person in the realm. This was an extreme level of revenge. There were thousands of Jews in the empire. He nourished his anger to the point that he developed a plan to rid the nation of all the Jewish people, not just Mordecai whom he hated violently.

The word “scorn” in Hebrew, is “bawzaw” (בָּזָה) which means “to despise,” “to remove all esteem,” “to see one as contemptible.” Haman despised Mordecai so completely that he had a burning desire to kill all of the Jews, the people of Mordecai. It is nearly impossible to imagine a more demented level of hatred. In this condition, Haman was capable of almost any vile action.

### **Esther 3:7-11 - Haman Deceived Xerxes About the Jew**

Haman immediately set about to bring his plan to fruition.

*In the twelfth year of King Xerxes, in the first month, the month of Nisan, they cast the pur (that is, the lot) in the presence of Haman to select a day and month. And the lot fell on the twelfth month, the month of Adar. Esther 3:7*

This may seem like the first three chapters took place one day after the other. That, of course, is not true. Earlier the text refers to the “third year of his reign” 1:3. In this verse, however, it speaks of the twelfth. year of the reign of Xerxes.

Concerning time, notice that they began “to cast Pur” (lots) in the first month of the year. This continued until the twelfth. month of the same year. It was common for the leaders to cast lots, to see if that day was an auspicious one on which to do any given deed. It is ironic that Haman began immediately and had to cast lots for a full year before he felt it was an auspicious time to take action against Mordecai. This was not just a flash of anger. Haman nourished his fury for a full year looking for an appropriate time to destroy thousands of Jews. It just never seemed to be an appropriate time to destroy the Jews. Haman should have taken a message from this, but he did not.

The time finally came for Haman to take action.

*Then Haman said to King Xerxes, "There is a certain people dispersed and scattered among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom whose customs are different from those of all other people and who do not obey the king's laws; it is not in the king's best interest to tolerate them." Esther 3:8*

Haman was a powerful man, but not as powerful as Xerxes. One might compare his position with that of Joseph in Egypt. Notice how skillfully he approached the subject with Xerxes. “There is a certain people dispersed and scattered among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom.” There are several observations concerning this statement:

1. **Haman did not identify who these people were.** He spoke of them as “there is a certain people.” That was not because Xerxes liked the Jews so well. They were apparently the source of some political irritation because of the rebuilding of Jerusalem. If he identified the group, Xerxes might have considered the loss too great to allow Haman to do as he wanted to do. This is due to the fact that there were a large contingent of Jewish slaves spread out throughout the empire.
2. **These people are scattered.** If they were all in one place, then the government might be confronted with an uprising. This was always a deep concern for a king who had a large number of slaves. He always had to be alert against a revolt.
3. **These people are in every province.** Again, if they had all been in one place, in one province, there could be repercussions to any drastic actions that they might

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take. The fact that they were carefully dispersed throughout every province nearly eliminated the possibility of a revolt when harsh measures were taken.

4. **They are different from other people.** In this statement, Haman would please Xerxes a great deal. If these people were a lot like others, then the others might be sympathetic to them and rise up with them in protest. Because they were different from all others, there would not be any other group that would side with them in revolt.
5. **These people disobey the king's laws.** To one extent, this was a true statement. The Jews were unwilling to obey some of the edicts of the king, especially those that would compromise their faithfulness to Jehovah.
6. **It is not in the king's best interest to put up with them.** Haman stated this in such a way that it appeared that he was doing the king a favor by mentioning it. It also appeared to be in the best interests of the king to kill these people. Observe that he said nothing about the fact that he was bitterly angry with them and wanted all of them to die.

Haman was not finished with his deception of the king.

*"If it pleases the king, let a decree be issued to destroy them, and I will put ten thousand talents of silver into the royal treasury for the men who carry out this business." Esther 3:9*

Having portrayed this as a wise move by the king, Haman then made a suggestion: "If it please the king." Again, he presented this in such a way that it was the king's doing and not his. At the same time, he had a precise suggestion so that the king's decision would accomplish just what Haman wanted to accomplish. Again, there are several pieces of information in this suggestion:

1. **"Let it be written..."** This was very important. If the king wrote a law, it could not be changed. It would be called "the law of the Persians and the Medes." Therefore, if Haman got Xerxes to dictate such a law, then no one could talk him into changing it for any reason. The law that he was to write was that these people, all the Jews, were to be destroyed.
2. **Haman promised "to give 10,000 talents of silver to the king's treasury."** This was a very smart move on the part of Haman. The king stood to lose many slaves. This would mean the loss of a great amount of money. This move would accomplish two things:
  - a. It would take away the feeling of financial loss from the king. This was a great concern. The king of the Medo-Persian empire was very wealthy, but it took great wealth to run his court the way he wanted to live. The promise of 10,000 talents of silver removed a great concern in this area. Think about this for a moment. It tells you that Haman was an extremely wealthy man. It also gives us an idea of just how much he hated these Jews. Again, notice that the promise of Haman was mentioned in silver. This is because silver was the most valuable precious metal of the day.

- b. It would give the king a good impression of Haman's loyalty to the king and the empire - he was willing to part with his own wealth in order to do something for the good of the king and the empire.

Haman was not a man to do anything that would not further his own interests. This particular action accomplished just what Haman wanted.

*So the king took his signet ring from his finger and gave it to Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. Esther 3:10*

The king was so impressed by Haman's offer that he gave him his ring. This was not just a piece of expensive jewelry. It was a way of conveying to Haman the control of the empire. The king would still rule, but Haman would run the affairs of the empire in every day to day detail. This was a tremendous gift. It was an almost impossible action on the part of Xerxes as we will see shortly. One of the byproducts of this action was that Haman would be envied by all the Medo-Persian princes because he would now have total power over them. This in turn would make them his enemies. They would look for ways to undercut his work as the leader of the empire.

Notice that the author identified Haman in three different ways:

- **He was the son of Hammedatha.** The name of Haman's father indicates that he was not from the Medo-Persian empire, but one taken as a captive in battle. His name probably comes from the descendants of Amalek.
- **He was an Agagite.** The name "Agagite" is usually a synonym for Amalekites. These were very ancient people from the area southwest of the Dead Sea, near the Egyptian border. Moses encountered them on more than one occasion. They were worshippers of Baal.
- **He was an enemy of the Jews.** Haman's hatred of the Jews did not originate with Mordecai. It was part of his heritage and upbringing. The Agagites were Amalekites. They had been enemies at least since the time of the Exodus. The relationship was as poor then as the hostility between the Jews and Arabs today.

These facts make it an unusual phenomenon that he would rise to the place of power in this massive empire that covered almost all of the then known world. We must remember that Mordecai had not told anyone that he was a Jew. We do not know how he was able to keep this secret.

The king was impressed with the apparent generosity of Haman.

*"Keep the money," the king said to Haman, "and do with the people as you please."  
Esther 3:11*

The king was so impressed with Haman's gesture that he told his viceroy to keep the silver he offered to give in order to fund the destruction of the Jews. He, also, gave Haman a free hand to do with the Jews as he pleased. Notice that in the previous accusation, there is no record that Haman told the king which people it was that refused to obey his laws. This is not surprising. This man ruled most of the known world of that day. He had many things on his mind. The one thing that you can not abide in such a large kingdom is insubordination. If this king does not have total obedience, he has no control of his kingdom at all. He

must either rule with an iron hand or he cannot rule. As far as Ahasuerus was concerned, it would not make any difference what group it was, they would all get the same treatment.

Put yourself in the place of Haman. You despise the Jews. Instead of just getting even with Mordecai, you plot to exterminate the entire nation. The Jews would be gone forever. His excitement would be almost without description. Haman could not only exterminate the Jews, he could do with them as he pleased. This is a blank check. It gives you some idea of how pleased the king was with the apparent generous offer Haman had made.

### **Esther 3:12 - 15 - Haman Issued Letter to Provinces - Kill All Jews**

Haman lost no time giving the necessary orders to carry out the wishes of the king.

*Then on the thirteenth day of the first month the royal secretaries were summoned. They wrote out in the script of each province and in the language of each people all Haman's orders to the king's satraps, the governors of the various provinces and the nobles of the various peoples. These were written in the name of King Xerxes himself and sealed with his own ring. Esther 3:12*

We need to remind ourselves that it was a time consuming task to send a message to every province of this vast empire. Every message had to be painstakingly copied by large numbers of scribes into a multitude of different languages. These messages had to be taken by courier to every part of the vast kingdom. This process would take months to accomplish.

We will focus our attention on this a bit later, but remember that this took place in the first month of the year, the thirteenth day. This was the month of Nisan on the civil calendar. This would correspond to our March, April.

Notice also, in this verse, that Haman did not take any chances. He could have sent the message to the rulers of each province and the command would have been carried out without fail. Haman did not trust this. He sent the message to the rulers, but he sent it to many others as well. According to the text, these lesser officials also received the command:

- **Satraps** - These were officials who ruled over major divisions of the Persian empire. Daniel and his friends were chosen for such positions. In our understanding, this might be like the ruler, in the former Russian Communist regime, where one person would be in charge of an area like the Ukraine or Russia.
- **Governors of Provinces** - There would be a number of provinces in these major divisions. A Governor would be in charge of one of these major portions of a division.
- **Nobles of the various peoples** - The provinces contained a large number of political divisions. In many cases, these political units were made up completely of people who had been made captive from a single country. There was a political language throughout the empire, but in these political subdivisions, their native language would be used. In many cases, these leaders were especially promising and gifted young men who came from among the captives.

Notice that these messages were sent in the name of the king and signed with his seal. This accomplished two things:

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1. Any message that came in the name of the king would be carried out with utmost care. There was no possibility that they would question it in any way. If the king said it, they did it.
2. If the message carried the name and signet of the king, the law could not be rescinded, even by the king. It was called “the law of the Medes and the Persians.” You will remember the ramifications of this fact in the story of Daniel. The king was unable to change the law, even though it was going to punish Daniel and the king did not want to see this happen.

Haman was taking no chances. He was placing leaders at every level of government under the responsibility to carry out his plan which was commanded under the name of the king himself.

Notice the way the messages were sent:

*Dispatches were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces with the order to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews—young and old, women and little children—on a single day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods. Esther 3:13*

The recording of such intricate detail usually indicates that the sender does not want any possibility of misunderstanding. Recipients of such a communication would be very clear that this was of utmost importance.

Notice the way Haman gave the message.

- There was a general message first.
- There was a more specific message which spelled out precisely what he wanted them to do.

Notice, also, the way Haman identified the Jews who were to be killed.

- All Jews
- The young and the old
- The women and little children. We must ask why it would be important to Haman to kill the women and children. Only when all the Jews were killed could his hatred be satisfied. He wanted to make sure that the name of every Jew was destroyed. This was the greatest shame that could come upon a man from that part of the world.

Under some circumstances, only the Jewish men would have been destroyed. Very often women and children would be spared and all the men would be slaughtered. This clarification made it obvious that Haman did not want them to observe any kindness in this instance.

In other circumstances, the very old and the very young would be bypassed in such an extermination. Again, Haman wanted it to be very clear that there was to be no Jewish person who escaped the weapons of the army. All were to be killed without mercy or kindness. Every Jewish person was to be put to the blade.



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Observe the way Haman described how completely he wanted the Jews to be put to death. He described this action in three different ways:

- **Destroyed** - the word is “shamad” (שָׁמַד). This comes from the root word which means “to make desolate,” “to utterly bring to naught,” “to tear down so that it cannot be rebuilt.” Haman made it clear that this was to be a devastation from which there could be no return.
- **Killed** - The word is “harag” (הָרַג). This means to smite with deadly intent, It is “to kill,” “to murder,” “to slaughter.” This word is more brutal than the previous one.
- **Annihilated** - The word is “abad” (אָבַד) which comes from a root word which means “to wander away,” “to perish,” “to be completely destroyed.” If a person wandered away in the desert, he was certain to perish. That is the reference of Haman in this word.

Notice, also, in this verse that there are three time designations mentioned:

1. **This was to be accomplished in one day.** Haman knew that if there was to be more than one day of brutality, some of these people would escape. This is one more indication of just how determined he was to kill off every single Jewish person in the land.
2. **It was to be done on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month.** This means that he sent out this message a full 11 months before the day on which it was to be carried out. We must remember that it would have taken some months for this message to arrive at the farthest provinces of the kingdom. Still, it appears that there would be at least four months for the leaders to plan the exact way in which they were going to make certain that they killed every Jew in their province on that day.
3. **This was further identified as the month of Adar.** This tells us about the calendar they used. Adar was the twelfth month on the Babylonian calendar. It is the same calendar that the Jewish people use today. The month of Adar is roughly similar to our February - March.

The next instruction was more insidious still. When the army had killed off every Jewish person, they were instructed to plunder the entire area. Haman wanted not only to kill the people, but to make sure that there was no trace of the fact that they had lived in the kingdom. This is surprising, in one sense. Soldiers often had to be forbidden to plunder an enemies position. In this instance, Haman commanded that they plunder the area. It was a way to not only kill the people, but to rid the empire of any trace of their existence. This is as hateful as one can get.

Verse 14 is a form of repetition.

*A copy of the text of the edict was to be issued as law in every province and made known to the people of every nationality so they would be ready for that day. Esther 3:14*

As we have emphasized before, repetition was their most popular form of emphasis. It was a way of making certain that the reader could not miss the emphasis the writer wanted to make.

The question naturally arises, why would it be important to send these messages to the rulers who came from every nationality in the kingdom? There is a favorite method that rulers centuries ago and today have used in order to control captive people. Conquerors sometimes controlled a conquered nation by placing one of their own in command. This person could influence the people and be held responsible for compliance. If a foreigner had been placed over them, the people could make trouble for the hated leader by disobedience. When the leader is one of their own, that motive is defused.

In other instances, the best leaders from each national group were taken and placed in positions of authority among other national groups. Again, this gave the captors someone to hold responsible without punishing one of their own. This is what happened in the book of Daniel and appears to have been the process in this kingdom as well.

The closing verse of the chapter gives reactions:

*Spurred on by the king's command, the couriers went out, and the edict was issued in the citadel of Susa. The king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Susa was bewildered. Esther 3:15*

When couriers were sent, they had to travel as fast as they could. Elsewhere we learn that the horses of these couriers were chosen because they were the fastest in the land. These riders were the best and most durable in the realm. They could travel the long distances faster than anyone else in the kingdom. This was an elite mail force.

This verse, also, gives us a glimpse of Haman's reaction. Having placed the machinery in motion, Haman was quite pleased with his accomplishment. The passage reveals that he sat down to drink. This was something that cautious officials did infrequently and with great care. They knew that if they were to get drunk, their life and position could be jeopardized. The word translated "drink" is "shawthah" (שׂוּתָה) and means "to imbibe," "to banquet or celebrate with people you want to impress." It was usually used to describe a falling-down drunken party. Haman was so happy to be rid of his most despised enemies that he had to find a ceremonial way to express it. Remember that this all grew out of the fact that Mordecai would not bow down to him. It gives you an impression of Haman's capacity for hatred and revenge.

Notice that this was a celebration which was shared by both Haman and the king. This is a picture of unusual conviviality. The king was usually more reserved than to party with the second in command. They usually celebrated together only on occasions when the king was being celebrated or trying to impress people. This suggests that the king was as excited about this accomplishment as Haman was. Haman had succeeded in making the king think Haman had done him a great favor.

There is a contrast in this verse. Having described the joy and reveling of Haman and the king, the author turned his attention to the people of the capital. He described their response as "bewildered." The word "bewildered" is "book" (בִּיב) and means "to involve," "to entangle" or "to perplex." These people could not understand why all the partying

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was going on. We must remember that this action had been done quite secretly. Apparently no one knew what Haman had gotten the king to do. The people knew that there was seldom, if ever, a party just to have a party. Such a feast almost always had an important reason. They could find no reason for these festivities. It left them confused at best.

### Conclusion

1. God allowed Haman to manipulate Xerxes for his own benefits. God, also, allowed Haman the consequences of his manipulations.
2. God allowed Haman to be given the position of power he craved.
3. God allowed the inner strength and devotion of Mordecai to come to a confrontation with Haman. This eventually will destroy Haman.
4. God allowed Haman's blinding hatred of Jews to move him to seek ambitious goals - exterminate all Jews.
5. God frustrated Haman's attempts to use Pur to indicate an auspicious time to approach the king against Mordecai. In reality, this was a gift of mercy that God extended to Haman in his evil designs. He was unable to see it for what it was.
6. God allowed Haman to have the position of great power to appear to accomplish his evil designs against the Jews. This shows in the celebration following the signing of the edict.
7. God allowed Haman to issue the horrible plan to execute all Jews. (He allowed Haman just what he wanted, but it turned out to be against himself.)
8. God allowed Haman to view himself as a victor and conqueror.

## QUESTIONS FOR ESTHER LESSON 4

### ESTHER 4:1 - 17

#### ESTHER AGREED TO GO TO THE KING

1. In Esther chapter four, there are four paragraphs. Write a brief summary of seven words or less for each paragraph.

4:1-3	
4:4-8	
4:9-12	
4:13-17	

2. In Esther 4:1-3, Mordecai discovered a plan to kill all the Jews.
  - a. In 4:1, when Mordecai learned of Haman's edict, he did something unusual.
    - (1). What did he do?
    - (2). What did it mean?
    - (3). For whose benefit did he do this?
  - b. In 4:2, Mordecai went one step farther with his actions.

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- (1). What did he do?
  - (2). What was the purpose of this?
- c. In 4:3, the author gave a summary of the Jewish reaction throughout the empire.
  - (1). What was the reaction?
  - (2). Why did they do this?
3. In Esther 4:4-8, Mordecai charged Esther to go to the king.
  - a. In 4:4, Esther was told of Mordecai's actions.
    - (1). How did she react?
    - (2). What did her actions mean?
    - (3). Why did she send people to Mordecai?
    - (4). Why didn't she go to him?
  - b. In 4:5, Esther sent Hathach on a mission to Mordecai.
    - (1). What was the nature of this mission?
    - (2). Why was it undertaken ?
    - (3). What does this tell you about Esther?
  - c. In 4:6, 7, Hathach went to Mordecai for an explanation.
    - (1). What could this encounter mean to Hathach?
    - (2). What did Mordecai tell him?
    - (3). What did this mean?
  - d. In 4:8, Mordecai urged Hathach to do two things:
    - (1). What were the two things?
    - (2). Why would Mordecai choose these two things rather than some others?
    - (3). What would be involved if Esther complied with Mordecai's instructions?
4. In 4:9-12, Hathach carried messages between Mordecai and Esther.
  - a. What did Esther instruct Hathach to say?
  - b. What problem did Esther see with Mordecai's instructions?
  - c. What reason did Esther give for her position?
5. In Esther 4:13-17, Mordecai chided Esther and Esther responded to his firm stand.
  - a. In 4:13-14, Mordecai responded to Esther's objections.
    - (1). What was his message to Esther? State this in your own words.
    - (2). This response identifies Mordecai's belief. How would you describe it?
    - (3). Mordecai gave Esther a challenge. What was it? How reasonable was it?
  - b. In 4:15, 16, Esther replied to Mordecai's challenge.
    - (1). What was her reply?
    - (2). What were the prerequisites she required?
    - (3). Why were these important to Esther?
    - (4). In your own words, describe Esther's view of her situation.
  - c. In 4:17, Mordecai responded to Esther's prerequisites.
    - (1). What was his response?
    - (2). What did he do?
6. Read the chapter again. Where do you see the hand of God at work here, even though the name of God is not found in the book?

## LESSON 4: – ESTHER 4:1 – 17

### ESTHER AGREED TO GO TO THE KING

#### Introduction

There are four paragraphs in Esther chapter four. A brief summary of each paragraph is recorded on the table which follows.

4:1-3	Mordecai Discovered Plans to Exterminate All Jews
4:4-8	Mordecai Charged Esther to Go to the King
4:9-12	Esther Explains Why She Cannot Go to Xerxes
4:13-17	Mordecai Chided Esther; Esther's Message - "If I perish, I Perish."

This is a chapter of high drama. Mordecai's distress and Esther's bold expression of courage rivet our attention. This is the highest emotional point so far in the book. One does not want to stop reading because the drama is so intense. The drama is heightened, however, because these details are treated in matter-of-fact fashion.

#### **Esther 4:1-3 - Mordecai Discovered Plans to Exterminate All Jews**

A quality of Mordecai stands out in the opening of this paragraph.

*When Mordecai learned of all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the city, wailing loudly and bitterly. Esther 4:1*

Mordecai was a man of power and position. He used that benefit to attempt to get rid of injustice. The other side of this must also be noted. Because he was a man with power and position, he attempted to challenge injustice at unusual risk to himself and his people.

It was not popular to let your Jewish background be known. Mordecai did not flaunt that fact, but when the appropriate time came, he let it be known; he took his stand.

Mordecai's response to Haman's travesty of justice was typically Jewish. They were graphic, demonstrative people. To express the depths of their sorrow, they would tear their clothes and put on sackcloth and cover themselves with ashes as Mordecai did. This was their universal expression of unbearable sorrow. It was particularly common when a loved one died.

As if that was not enough, he went one step further.

*But he went only as far as the king's gate, because no one clothed in sackcloth was allowed to enter it. Esther 4:2*

There was a large plaza in front of the king's gate. Mordecai dared to take his lament to the gate of the king. We must understand what the Scriptures mean when speaking of "the gate." This was not just a door. It also served as the place where the leaders of the city or nation gathered to conduct the business of state. It would be like saying that he went to the White House or the capitol building in America. Imagine it! One of the officials of the

government putting on his own protest at the gate of the palace, at the place where leaders consulted with other national leaders. He had to know that this could cost him his life.

He knew it was illegal to enter the palace grounds dressed in sackcloth. The palace was to be a place of joy and tranquillity. The palace was protected by a law which forbade any person from entering the grounds in sackcloth or other symbols of great sorrow. Nevertheless, Mordecai went as far as he could to focus attention upon the plight of his people.

Mordecai was not the only one who mourned and wailed.

*In every province to which the edict and order of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing. Many lay on sackcloth and ashes. Esther 4:3*

In every province of the kingdom, Jews were expressing their deep anguish. One wonders just how these Jews would know about this coming destruction. We have no inkling of just how this news got out. The Jewish people expressed their anguish by fasting, weeping, wailing and covering themselves with sackcloth and ashes. This, at least in part, was what Mordecai was doing.

This gives us additional information. When the Jews were carried into captivity, they were sent into every province of the empire. This was not done with the other national groups. Other groups were kept intact and one of their own was placed in a position of responsibility over them. The king chose to separate the Jews from each other as a way of reducing the possibility of problems growing out of group activity. The Jewish people, for centuries, had a reputation of causing trouble for their captors. This is what made the Roman occupation of Israel so difficult in the first century.

This paragraph gives us an impression of the emotional climate of the empire at the time Haman's diabolical plans were set in motion.

#### **Esther 4:4-8 - Mordecai Charged Esther to Go to the King**

Against the background of this pain and anguish, Mordecai acted to do more than simply demonstrate his distress.

It appears that Esther knew of Mordecai's distress, but not of that of other Jews. This information was brought to her attention.

*When Esther's maids and eunuchs came and told her about Mordecai, she was in great distress. She sent clothes for him to put on instead of his sackcloth, but he would not accept them. Esther 4:4*

In this verse, we gain another insight into the life of the court. It was not permissible for the queen to venture outside the palace. She depended upon trusted servants to keep her abreast of events on the outside. In this instance, it was her seven maidservants who sought out information for her. It also included the guards who protected her at all times. The guards and maid servants all lived outside the palace and could come and go without suspicion. Part of their task was to provide such information as she might need. It appears that they did this with great loyalty.

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The question is raised if these maidservants and guards told Esther only this information or if they were her regular link with life outside the palace. The text does not say, but I would assume that this was an assignment they regularly performed on behalf of the Queen.

Esther's response could be anticipated. Our text is less graphic than the Hebrew text. The Hebrew word "Hiyl" (חַיִּיל) literally means "travail," "to be in anguish," "to writhe in pain." This describes a level of sorrow which would be difficult to exceed. Esther was totally devastated.

The author also reported that Esther sent a garment to clothe Mordecai. Now, Mordecai was one of the rulers of Persia. He, at this time, was clothed in sackcloth, the symbolic covering of sorrow. Esther was not making sure that Mordecai had nice clothing. This was a symbolic message. It was a gracious, symbolic way to gently encourage Mordecai to stop the vigil of sorrow and let her know what was going on.

Because Mordecai had cared for Esther like a father, he knew her quite well. Still, he refused the invitation at great personal risk. The Queen did not have the power exerted by the king. Nevertheless, she was the wife of the king. She may not have power of her own, but she had access to the power of the throne of Persia. Mordecai still refused to comply with her wishes.

Esther was not satisfied with Mordecai's response. Notice her determined effort:

*Then Esther summoned Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs assigned to attend her, and ordered him to find out what was troubling Mordecai and why. Esther 4:5*

This is an interesting approach. The man called "Hathach" is new to the book of Esther. The author said that he was one of the king's "eunuchs," guards at the door. The author further taught that "Hathach" was appointed to be the guard charged with the care of the Queen. Some Jewish scholars believe that "Hathach" was really Daniel. There is no specific evidence for or against this assertion. I doubt its reality. If a person fell from grace in the court, that person would hardly be positioned as the trusted guard of the Queen.

Whoever he was, Hathach was a trusted servant of the Queen. When she wanted dependable information, he was the one she called. Previously, Esther took a less direct measure. Now it was different. She sent Hathach directly to Mordecai. Hathach was instructed to get two pieces of information from her cousin:

1. **What is this "vigil of sorrow" all about?** This suggests that the nature of this symbolic act had not reached the vibrant gossip line that penetrated every corner of the palace.
2. **Why does this "vigil of sorrow" disturb the peace of the palace?** Esther's question concerning why this was disturbing the peace of the palace tells us that for some reason she did not know what had happened. Also, this tells us that Mordecai's actions got the attention of people within the palace as well as the King's gate and the nearby center city. This is not surprising since this was a secret mission that Haman had initiated.

Why would Esther be concerned? There may be several reasons:

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1. There is the natural curiosity of hearing unusual noises and the crowd that it naturally spawns.
2. Royalty, though powerful, was always sensitive to crowds and noise. People who opposed a ruler or wanted his position couldn't just wait until the next election. If you wanted to rule or if you wanted to unseat flawed power, you must take it from them. This was always violent. Ruling families were always sensitive to this possibility.
3. Being an unidentified Jew, Esther had to live with a certain amount of tension hoping that her secret would never become known. This was all the more crucial because she was now the Queen of Persia.

Hathach faithfully carried out the desires of the queen:

*So Hathach went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate. Esther 4:6*

This sounds quite innocuous. It was not. Put yourself in the place of Hathach. He has been honored for bravery and loyalty to the king by being made a special palace guard. The fact that he guarded the queen and not the king suggests that he was a soldier of lower rank, but superior performance.

Mordecai, on the other hand, was a high ranking official of the government. He had great influence even in the military ranks of the greatest national power in the world of that day.

Now, imagine this guard approaching this national leader. Imagine Hathach asking Mordecai what he was doing. Imagine, also, how Hathach would feel doing this in front of the curious crowd that would gather for such an event.

Mordecai was more given to mourning than to anger.

*Mordecai told him everything that had happened to him, including the exact amount of money Haman had promised to pay into the royal treasury for the destruction of the Jews. Esther 4:7*

He was deliberate and intentional. Notice that the author said, "Mordecai told him everything that had happened to him." This is interesting. It was an edict against all Jews, but Mordecai thought about it as something that happened to him. If you think about it carefully, Mordecai was right. This whole scenario came into being because Mordecai repeatedly refused to bow down before Haman even though the king had commanded it.

It would be understandable if Mordecai was driven with anger. He was the one who saved the life of the king, but Haman was the one who received the honors. Nevertheless, factual considerations dominated Mordecai's attention at this point.

Mordecai, also, explained to Hathach about the amount of money that Haman had volunteered to give to the treasury to bring about the destruction of the Jews. Think about this for a moment. The amount of money Haman offered Xerxes, but which was not received, would not have appeared in the message sent to the leaders of the 127 provinces. There are several possibilities concerning this question:



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1. Haman knew about it, but he would not have warned Mordecai, his enemy.
2. Xerxes obviously knew about it. It is possible that he knew about Mordecai and warned him. This is not probable.
3. There were two trusted guards who were always with the king. They would certainly have known the details of the agreement. It is quite possible that they warned Mordecai.
4. Palace gossip was the most efficient communications system in the world. It is most likely that this was the source of Mordecai's information about Haman's offer to Xerxes.
5. There would be a scribe present to record their decisions.

There is further reason to believe that the most probable source of Mordecai's information was the Shushan gossip line.

*He also gave him a copy of the text of the edict for their annihilation, which had been published in Susa, to show to Esther and explain it to her, and he told him to urge her to go into the king's presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people. Esther 4:8*

Mordecai had secured a copy of the letter that was being sent to the leaders of all 127 provinces in their own languages. The text does not tell us how Mordecai came into possession of the document. It is reasonable to believe, however, that someone from the scribal office secured a copy and made sure that it found its way to Mordecai. Mordecai was a man of great strength and determination. He was willing to risk for what he knew was right.

The queen was not a person of great power, but she had great influence with the king as well as other leaders who sought the favor of the king. Nevertheless, Mordecai told Hathach to instruct Esther to go to the king. This was a risky thing for Mordecai to do even though Esther was related to him.

The Hebrew of this verse speaks a bit more strongly. The author's statement that Mordecai's instruction to the guard was, "He told him to urge her to go into the king's presence." The word "urged" is "tsavah" (צָוָה) and means "to enjoin forcefully," "command," "to send a messenger." The wording would be polite, but the force of the words would be devastating. This is a command that one would expect from a father, for Mordecai had cared for Esther as his own daughter. Mordecai was willing to risk a great deal for his faith. He was willing to risk much more for his people. He expected others to be willing to take the same risks.

It seems like a simple instruction, but for the Queen of Persia it was life threatening. She, like anyone else, was not permitted to come before the king unless she had been properly invited. The violation of this law was punishable by death. Mordecai certainly knew that he was asking Esther to risk her life. We must remember, however, that he was not asking her to do anything that he was not already doing out in the center of town.

Mordecai was not dealing with idle gossip. He gave a copy of the edict to Hathach to give to Esther. He had explained the whole situation to the eunuch/guard and instructed him to explain it all to Esther.

Mordecai's instructions were clear:

1. She was to "beg for mercy." This word is "channowth" (חַנּוּת) and means "to implore," "to entreat as graciously as one knows how," "to plead," "to make intense supplication." She was to work upon the king's pity for her and for her people with all her ability.
2. She was to "plead with him for her people." This statement means to strive after with all your powers, to beg without any interpolation. Mordecai told Esther to be as convincing as she could possibly be; to use all her powers to beg and plead with the king to spare her people.

These instructions were simple enough, but they created some very real problems with them:

1. She must identify the fact that she was a Jew. This would jeopardize her life.
2. She must put the king in an awkward position:
  - a. He cannot change the edict. It was written as law of the Medes and Persians.
  - b. He did not want to refuse his wife.
3. If she went to the king uninvited, it would mean certain death.
4. If she waited to be summoned, it would probably be too late.

Mordecai, through Hathach, had succeeded in placing Esther on the spot with himself. Mordecai had chosen to risk his life in order to draw attention to the plight of his people. Now Esther was confronted with the same choice.

Little is known of Hathach, the eunuch/guard of Esther. The name is Hebrew. This could mean that he was a Jew, but not necessarily. As we said earlier in this study, promising Jews, like Mordecai, were chosen for government service. The people who chose Mordecai certainly knew that he was a Jew. The same could be true for Hathach. The possibilities, however, are less.

#### **Esther 4:9-12 - Esther Explained Why She Could Not Go to Xerxes.**

Whoever he was, this guard served Mordecai and Esther quite faithfully.

*Hathach went back and reported to Esther what Mordecai had said. Esther 4:9*

At this point, Hathach could have found favor at the highest levels of government if he had told Haman and the king what had just transpired. He chose the more faithful, less glamorous way and apparently said nothing. Hathach showed a willingness to take the risk of carrying out these communications between Esther and Mordecai. Remember, these messages were not written. He knew exactly what the message was. He could not claim innocence of their contents. If this had been known, it would have been viewed as treason and subverting a command of the king. He would have been killed immediately.

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In spite of this, Hathach reported the news to Esther, just as Mordecai had instructed him.

One problem with clandestine efforts is that they are seldom single events. They become quite involved.

*Then she instructed him to say to Mordecai, Esther 4:10*

Esther sent word, again, to Mordecai by Hathach. Remember, each time this guard carried a message and met with Mordecai or Esther, he increased the possibilities of being caught. Add to this the fact that there were officers of the court whose task it was to keep an eye on palace servants and lower level officials. The possibility of his not being discovered were increasingly diminished. Still, Hathach carried the message from Esther to Mordecai.

Esther's message to Mordecai revealed some of her tension and frustration.

*"All the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that he be put to death. The only exception to this is for the king to extend the gold scepter to him and spare his life. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king." Esther 4:11*

It is as though Mordecai had not considered the effect his instructions might have on the queen. Just in case he had forgotten, she reminded him.

Esther spoke of this as something that every person in the kingdom would know very well. This was a not too mild reprimand. It was like she had said, "What is wrong with you? Don't you remember that any man or woman who approached the king in the palace without invitation would be put to death? The only exception to this was if the king extended his scepter to the person, sparing his/her life. The experience of Vashti suggested that this was not probable. This was probably more direct and edgy than Esther had ever been with Mordecai. We must remember that she was dealing with imminent death.

She concluded her tension-filled response by reminding Mordecai that the king had not sent for her in the previous month. This suggests that her possibility of being called by the king was very slim.

There were messages going back and forth between the two of them.

*When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, Esther 4:12*

In this translation it sounds like the beginning of a sentence, rather than the end of a paragraph. It does, in fact, conclude the paragraph. The text tells us how this conversation was carried on long distance.

**Esther 4:13-17 - Mordecai Chided Esther; Esther's Message - "If I Perish; I Perish."**

You will notice that as the conversation goes back and forth, the emotional level tends to increase.

*...he sent back this answer: "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape." Esther 4:13*

There is a noticeable increase in the emotional response of Mordecai as well. Despite the increased tension of his words, Mordecai reminded Esther of realistic dangers. The law, as Haman wrote it, spoke of "all Jews." Because it was "the law of the Medes and the Persians" it could not be rescinded and no one could be exempted. Now, Mordecai was strongly reminding Esther of the fact that she was already at risk. Her failure to approach the king would not remove her from harm's way.

Mordecai continued his impassioned response,

*"For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?" Esther 4:14*

This final portion of Mordecai's response contains three parts:

1. **"If you keep silent, relief and deliverance for the Jews will come from another source."** He does not say so, but we assume that Mordecai was speaking about God as the source of this deliverance. But - this suggests that a contrast is coming.
2. **"You and your father's family will perish."** There is no reason to believe that anyone from Esther's primary family was still alive except the queen herself. If anyone of them was alive, she would have lived with them instead of with her cousin, Mordecai. Was he speaking of himself as "your father's family"? We suspect that he was.
3. You may have come to be Queen for this very purpose. Mordecai did not say, "God placed you in this position in order to save yourself and your people from this terrible crime." It is clear, however, that this was his intent. This put a weight on Esther's shoulders. If she refused to obey Mordecai's instructions, she would be, thereby, resisting and refusing the will of God for her life. Now Esther must seemingly choose between life and God.

There is no way to tell if Esther thought about her reply a long time or not. As you read the text, it sounds as though she replied immediately.

*Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: Esther 4:15*

It must seem as though Esther gave an immediate response. That was probably not the case, but it does seem that way. Nevertheless, she did answer. Observe that previously the text stated that Hathach carried the message. That fact is missing in this verse. That does not mean that someone else carried the message. It rather appears that the focus has shifted from the messenger to the dynamic message with which Esther and Mordecai were now involved.

Esther's answer was memorable.

*"Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish." Esther 4:16*

Her reply consists of two parts: An instruction and a promise.

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1. **The instruction** - The first thing we should note about this instruction is that it was a command. It was not a suggestion. It was a royal command which could not be ignored. Her reply suggests that there were other Jews in the capital city. Because this was the capital city, one wonders why the government would knowingly bring Jews, thought to be potential troublemakers, into the capital city. Esther instructed Mordecai to gather the Jews of Susa to fast for her for three days. They were neither to eat or drink during that time. This would be difficult. When they fasted, they would also pray. These people would be absent from their jobs and some would be in government positions.  
The purpose of fasting was usually twofold: To give total focus to prayer, and to give themselves to acts of kindness and mercy. It is fair to assume that they believed that this unprecedented sacrifice would cause God to intervene on their behalf. Esther asked them to commit themselves to very serious sacrifice and prayer on behalf of their dilemma and her attempt to bring about a rescue.
2. **The promise** - She promised that she "**and her maids**" would fast as she had instructed others to do. The fact that Esther "**and her maids**" would also fast raises a question. If the maids were going to join in this fast, does this mean these maids were also Jews? There are a few possibilities:
  1. A queen would have every opportunity to choose her own servants. It would certainly be possible that she intentionally chose servants who were Jewish.
  2. She may have chosen servants who were not Jewish. Obviously, by this time everyone in the palace would know she was Jewish. Because the Queen fasted, she could command the servants to fast and they would do so.
  3. She may have had a mixture of Jewish and people of other nationalities as her servants and still instructed them to fast with her.

All of these are possible, but it appears that the first suggestion seems the most plausible.

Esther promised that when the three day fast was ended, she would go to the king. What bold determination! What self-sacrifice this young woman demonstrated! She was knowingly promising to do something that should cost her life.

Esther's second promise is shocking, "I will go to the king, even though it is against the law." The word "go" is "bow" (בָּו). It means "go." It is interesting that in the Old Testament it was used to describe Jehovah as the one who goes to His people. He comes to them in mercy and in the power to protect and defend. Esther had resolved to go to the king. It was not done in fear, though great danger was immanent. She would go to the king, "**even though** it was against the law. Esther's act was intentional. She made a deliberate choice between obeying the law of her husband, which would spare her life at least temporarily, and saving her people on the other hand. With both great risk and strength, she chose to attempt to save her people.

Esther's final message to Mordecai was with words that rivet our attention. It is a startling statement in English. It is even more startling in the Hebrew. A literal statement of the phrase would read, "If **I have** perished, I have perished." Esther's words divulge her thinking. There is a great difference between "If I perish" (some time in the future) and "If

I have perished," (an accomplished fact before it was done.) In Esther's thinking, it was not just a possibility that she would be destroyed. It was an accomplished fact waiting to be completed. She vowed to go to the king and plead for her people knowing that when she stood before his throne, she was as good as dead already. In her mind, she was sacrificing herself for her people.

One can only imagine how Mordecai felt and reacted when this message was reported to him. The text gives us no hint. It does tell us what he did.

*So Mordecai went away and carried out all of Esther's instructions. Esther 4:17*

Mordecai and Esther have now reversed rolls, to some extent. Ever since Esther lost her immediate family, she was accustomed to do what Mordecai told her to do. In one sense that is what she was doing now. In another sense, Esther had given a strong order. Now Mordecai was carrying out that order just as the queen had given it. He gathered the Jewish people of Susa together and they fasted for three full days.

### **Conclusion**

We noted earlier, that God is not mentioned directly in the book of Esther. At the conclusion of each chapter, we have looked to see if there had been any indication of the actions of God in that chapter. We want to do the same here.

None of the events of this chapter literally indicate that God did anything at all. At the same time, however, there are a large number of apparent coincidences in the chapter that cannot be reasonably explained.

The edict Haman wrote on behalf of the king was supposed to be top-secret, confidential information. Suddenly, Mordecai knew even the amount of money Haman offered the king in order to get rid of the Jews. Mordecai even had a copy of the edict. Did this just happen or was God quietly involved in the events of their lives?

Mordecai had everything to lose and apparently nothing to gain by refusing to bow and by making his demonstration at the king's gate. Nevertheless, he found strength to stand when reason said it was futile.

Not only did Mordecai discover this plot, but the carefully designed secret was discovered by the Jews in every part of the kingdom. This was one of the poorest kept secrets in history.

Was it a coincidence that Esther was a Jewish queen in the land of Persia just at the same time when she could help her people the most? Was it coincidence that Mordecai, a Jew, became one of the top officials of the empire, just at the time when his power and position could be most helpful to his people?

Was it raw stubbornness that moved Mordecai to refuse to bow down to Haman, the Agagite, a national group who were the worst enemies of the Jews?

What a propitious situation that Esther had a faithful guard, apparently a Jew, at least he had a Jewish name, to whom she could entrust her deepest secrets without fear of being exposed, or was it just propitious?

The crux of Mordecai's strength seems obvious in verse 14.

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*For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?" Esther 4:14*

Though the name of God was not used in this chapter, It seems clear that Mordecai spoke of God when he said, "If you (Esther) do nothing, still Israel will be delivered." I believe that Mordecai was affirming his belief that God would again deliver His people as He did at Egypt. There are a number of things in this chapter that, for me, point to the hand of God working in the lives of His people.

1. God strengthened Mordecai to take unpopular stand to draw attention to Jewish plight.
2. God gave Hathach courage to take the message to Mordecai, repeatedly, when it could be seen as treason.
3. God enabled Mordecai to discover the plot to kill all the Jews.
4. Mordecai persisted in urging Esther to go to the king.
5. God gave Esther strength to accept the challenge to go to the king at the risk of her life.





## QUESTIONS FOR ESTHER LESSON 5

### ESTHER 5:1 - 14

#### ESTHER RISKED EVERYTHING TO TAKE HER STAND

1. In Esther chapter five, there are three paragraphs. On the following table, write a summary of seven words or less for each paragraph.

5:1-4	
5:5-8	
5:9-14	

2. In Esther 5:1-4 Esther invited both Xerxes and Haman to a wine banquet.
- In 5:1, Esther went to the throne room as she promised.
    - How was she dressed? Why?
    - What is the importance of the position of the king?
  - In 5:2, the king noticed that Esther was there.
    - What was his response?
    - This was an unusual response. Why?
    - What did Xerxes do when he saw Esther?
    - What did this mean?
  - In 5:3, the king recognized Esther.
    - What offer did Xerxes make?
    - What limitation did Xerxes make on his gift? Why did he do that?
  - In 5:4, the queen replied to the king's question.
    - What was her reply?
    - As you read this request, what goes through your mind?
3. In Esther 5:5-8, Esther restated her request.
- In 5:5, Xerxes hurried Haman to the party.
    - Think about this for a moment. What is wrong with that scene?
    - What was the avowed purpose of the hurried trip?
  - In 5:6, Xerxes presses Esther for an answer to his question.
    - What did he want to know?
    - Compare Xerxes promise with that which he previously made. What did you find?
    - Xerxes spoke of both a "petition" and a "request." What, if any, is the difference between the two?
  - In 5:7, 8, Esther made her request.
    - Esther prefaced her request with two conditions. What are they?
    - What do they mean?
    - What was her request?
    - How would you describe this request? Was it a wise thing to do?
4. In Esther 5:9-14, Haman bragged and built the gallows.
- In 5:9, you can see a contrast in the moods of Haman.

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- (1). What were the two moods?
  - (2). What caused both moods?
  - (3). What does this tell you about Haman?
- b. In 5:10, the author described Haman's response to the disturbing scene.
  - (1). What did the author say he did? What does that mean?
  - (2). Haman did something unusual. What was it?
  - (3). In the last half of the verse, Haman did something important. What was it?
- c. In 5:11, the author described the gathering.
  - (1). Specifically, what did Haman do?
  - (2). How would we describe such activity in our culture?
  - (3). Why would he do such a thing?
- d. In 5:12, Haman continued his presentation to his guests.
  - (1). What did he tell them?
  - (2). What impression was Haman hoping to make on his guests?
  - (3). If you were one of the guests, what would your impression be?
- e. In 5:13, there is a sudden emotional turn.
  - (1). What was that turn?
  - (2). What was responsible for it?
  - (3). What does this say about the enduring quality of position?
- f. In 5:14, Haman's wife and friends offered a solution.
  - (1). What was their solution to Haman's problem?
  - (2). Study the verse carefully. What was their suggestion that this would do for Haman?
  - (3). What does this say both about the guests and Haman?
5. Again, read the chapter carefully. What evidence do you see of the activity of God in the chapter?

## LESSON 5: – ESTHER 5:1 – 14

### ESTHER RISKED EVERYTHING TO TAKE HER STAND

There are three paragraphs in Esther chapter five. They are as follows:

5:1-4	Esther Invited Xerxes and Haman to a Wine Banquet
5:5-8	Request: Come to my Banquet Tomorrow
5:9-14	Haman Bragged and Built Gallows

The drama is quite high in this chapter. Observe the contrasts involved:

1. There was great joy for Haman, but he was angry with Mordecai.
2. Haman bragged and rejoiced, but he was walking into a serious trap.
3. Xerxes was probably confused; Haman was exuberant over what he saw as an honor.

The drama the author reported is now taking form.

#### **Esther 5:1-4 - Esther Invited Xerxes and Haman to Wine Banquet**

Esther did exactly as she had promised Mordecai.

*On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the palace, in front of the king's hall. The king was sitting on his royal throne in the hall, facing the entrance. Esther 5:1*

She did not act on her promise until the three days of fasting were complete. When Esther put on her royal robes and went to the courtyard outside the throne room, it was clear to the king that this was not a casual, social visit. Observe that the author said that “Esther stood in the inner court.” When a person, especially the queen, stands before the king, it is clear that they have a request. The fact that she came before the king in her royal robes, but uninvited, tells the king just how important this event really was.

The fact that Xerxes sat on the throne suggests that he was prepared to deal with the business of the court. Esther had chosen her timing very well. The king was sensitive to the existence of her mission, though he was unaware of its purpose.

*When he saw Queen Esther standing in the court, he was pleased with her and held out to her the gold scepter that was in his hand. So Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter. Esther 5:2*

The text suggests that Esther was patient. She did not hurry or force her way into the throne room. She waited patiently until the king noticed her presence.

The king apparently did not see Esther initially. When he noticed her, the text says that she obtained favor in his sight. This is surprising. Officially, this was a source of great irritation in the court and was never countenanced.

The author indicated that the king held out the scepter which he held. Everyone in the court would have been watching for this. If the king acknowledged her presence, but did not reach out the scepter toward her, she would die. It was a visual way of saying, “I protect you from the law.” There must have been a collective sigh of relief running through the court as Xerxes began to hold out his scepter toward the queen. This would also have been a shock because this was a most unusual action for the king.

The author continued reporting that Esther came near and touched the top of the king’s scepter. The fact that Esther came near to the king on his throne indicated that she had a special request to make. We saw this same situation in the story of Joseph. This indicates that Esther not only risked her life coming into the king’s presence without invitation, but she ran the same risk by coming close to the king to make her request.

Everyone in the court would have expected the king to speak to Esther as he did.

*Then the king asked, “What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be given you.” Esther 5:3*

In the Hebrew, the king’s words to his wife sound a bit different: “What for you (an exclamation), Esther, O Queen, what is your request/petition, even to half of the kingdom and it will be given to you.” Had she no serious request, she would not have dared to come into his presence. As we read this verse, we are shocked at the king’s generosity and trust when he did not know what she was going to ask. It was not uncommon for a ruler to make this kind of an offer to someone he liked very much or really wanted to impress. You will remember that Herod Agrippa made much the same offer to the daughter of Herodias. She had danced and pleased Herod Agrippa. He told her to ask for anything she wished, up to half of his kingdom. Still Xerxes made it clear that when Esther violated his law, he cared so much for her that he spared her life and offered her anything she wanted, up to half of his kingdom, even before she made her request.

Esther could have taken advantage of this most generous offer, but that was not her purpose.

*“If it pleases the king,” replied Esther, “let the king, together with Haman, come today to a banquet I have prepared for him.” Esther 5:4*

Observe that though she was the queen, still she couched her request in such a way that the matter was left to his favor when she said, “If it pleases the king...” This must have shocked the entire court. The queen risked her life to invite the king and his second in command to a banquet. Nevertheless, that was her request. Like our president, the king’s schedule was always full. It was asking a lot to invite him to come to a banquet on the same day that the request was made. Nevertheless, that was the request she made. Notice that she worded her request very cautiously. She was careful to invite the king before she mentioned Haman. This was proper court procedure and decorum. It should also be noted that the word “banquet” was “mishteh” (מִשְׁתֶּה). This is a banquet, but it is more a time to drink, than to eat. It was sometimes called a “wine banquet.” In modern culture, it would be more like inviting someone for cocktails. It was a casual, relaxed time for just enjoying the company of friends.

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You can also observe that the preparation for this wine feast has already been completed. Esther fully intended that the two men would join her for this feast. It was not as though she would prepare the feast if everyone agreed. It was already prepared, awaiting only their presence.

In the Hebrew text of verse four, you will see these words. They are to be viewed from right to left.

יְבֹא הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהָמָן הַיּוֹם

If you look carefully, you will notice that I have made one letter bold in each of the four words. If you put these four letter together, you have a new word - (יהוה) (why). This is the word “Jehovah” the unspeakable name for God, the name which is most often used in Scripture in contexts where God as the eternal judge is the subject. It should be noted that Jewish writers loved to hide messages in their writings in this fashion.

As indicated earlier, the name for God, as such, does not appear in the book of Esther. Some scholars, including some Jewish scholars, believe that God did this intentionally. Historically, God often acted without announcing His presence. The story of Joseph is replete with evidence of God’s presence and action though God is not mentioned except in retrospect. It appears that this is exactly what the author has included in this verse.

### **Esther 5:5-8 - Request: Come to My Banquet Tomorrow**

There is no record of Xerxes’ response to Esther. One can imagine how he reacted. It is quite obvious that he loved his wife. He spared her life when she did something that certainly made him extremely angry. No one can get inside the mind of the king, but if I were in that situation, I would certainly have wondered, “Did she risk her life just to invite me to share a relaxed social time?”

Though we do not know what Xerxes thought, we do know what he did.

*“Bring Haman at once,” the king said, “so that we may do what Esther asks.” So the king and Haman went to the banquet Esther had prepared. Esther 5:5*

Xerxes did not issue an invitation, but a command. The king agreed to attend the event. He also moved quickly to insure that Haman joined him immediately. Both men were present when it was time for the wine feast.

Having come to the banquet, the king now wanted to satisfy his curiosity.

*As they were drinking wine, the king again asked Esther, “Now what is your petition? It will be given you. And what is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted.” Esther 5:6*

It is as though the king could hardly wait to discover the request the Queen wished to make. At the earliest opportunity, he raised the issue again.

He spoke of both a petition and a request. This suggests two possibilities.

- It could be a parallelism. This is a way to use two slightly different statements to describe the same situation or condition.
- It could be a careful statement to describe two different situations:

It appears that this is what the author reports of the king's statements:

1. **“What is your petition?”** The word “petition” is “shelah” (שֶׁלַח). It is a petition or request. It is the word Eli used, in I Samuel 1:17, wishing for Hannah, “...the God of Israel grant thy **petition**.” This speaks of a personal desire for God to act.  
 With this question, the king made a promise - “It will be given you.” This is an unconditional promise. The king doesn’t yet know what he is promising, but still it is without restrictions. His love for Esther had to be immense. His trust for the queen was without reservation. Notice, also, that he made this promise in front of witnesses. This meant that no matter what she requested, he could not refuse. He would be forced to keep his word.
2. **“What is your request?”** This is a different word from “petition,” even in the Hebrew. The word “request” is “bakkawshaw” (בַּקָּשָׁה). The word means “to search for,” “to strive after,” “to plead for on behalf of another.” This word for a desired response seems to suggest that the petitioner makes the request on behalf of another party. It is more like intercession.

Again, when the king asked the question, he followed it with an unconditional promise. He said, “Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted.” A king did not have the right to give more than half of his kingdom to another ruler. Xerxes was offering the absolute limit of what he had to give away. This was no idle offer. If there was any doubt of what he thought of his Queen, this experience removed all doubt. Again, there is no way for the king to refuse because the promise is without reservation and it was given in front of at least one witness and probably more.

It appears that Xerxes used the word “petition” to identify the queen’s personal request. He apparently used the word “request” to identify the request of the queen on behalf of others. He did not know which it would be, but he wanted her to know that it did not matter. He would give her anything that she requested, so long as it was in his power to bestow. This was absolutely amazing. Everyone would be aghast at his words. Because the king had made this statement before witnesses, it would not be possible for him to refuse to carry out his promise. This is not the only time that this offer was made in Scripture. Such an offer was made, by the king, on three occasions in the book of Esther. It is clear that Xerxes really meant what he offered to Esther. Herod also made this offer to the daughter of Herodias, in Mark 6:23.

Finally, Esther responded to Xerxes’ invitation

*Esther replied, "My petition and my request is this:..." Esther 5:7*

There is a high level of respect offered Xerxes by Esther. This is especially true in view of the law which he had signed.

Notice that Esther spoke very carefully. She said, "My petition and request is..." The king was eager to find out what the queen wanted. The care of her statement would not be wasted on him. Speaking of both "a request" and "a petition," she indicated that it was a request both on behalf of herself and others. From this, he could have gained a clue that she was, in fact, a Jew and was seeking help for herself and her people. We do not know if he caught the careful statement. Our suspicion is that this nuance was not wasted on him.

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As Esther continued her request, she showed great deference to the king.

*"If the king regards me with favor and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request, let the king and Haman come tomorrow to the banquet I will prepare for them. Then I will answer the king's question." Esther 5:8*

This sentence is made up of two conditional phrases. This is made clear by Esther's use of "if...then." Notice the two conditional phrases she chose:

- **"If I have found favor in the sight of the king."** This had to be a statement of deference. There was no way to miss the fact that she had found great favor in his eyes. Had this not been the case, she would have died for coming into his presence uninvited.
- **"If it please the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request."** Here is that use of both the words "request" and "petition" again. She has emphasized this intentionally. Again, this would not have escaped his attention. She deferred to the wishes of the king. It was a way of making a strong request, without placing pressure on the king to do it.

Having carefully identified her conditions of request, Esther finally stated her desire. "Let the king and Haman come tomorrow to the banquet I will prepare for them. Then I will answer the king's question." Now Esther had just invited them to the wine banquet in which they were now participating. It had to be a bit confusing to be invited to yet another banquet. Whatever else he may have thought, this had to be confusing to the king. They had been invited to this wine banquet and now Esther invited them to another wine banquet the following day. She announced that at that time she would do as the king had said. It is assumed that she meant that she would identify the nature of her request. Though the text does not indicate it, there appears to be a strong desire on the part of the king to find out just what the queen was leading up to.

Several things were confusing for the king. If she had a serious request for him, why was it necessary for Haman to be present? Why did Esther have to invite both men to a wine banquet in order to invite both men to a second wine banquet? Incidentally "wine banquet" is the same word previously used. Why didn't she just ask him for what she wanted; since he had already promised that it would be granted? She had said that she had a request to make. It was clear that there was more than a request on her mind.

In her statement, in verse 8, Esther promised that she would reveal the mystery at the wine banquet she had invited both men to attend the following day. There can be no doubt that the king was unaccustomed to being strung along like this. Had he not loved Esther with all his heart, he would not have allowed her to get away with this charade.

### **Esther 5:9-14 - Haman Bragged and Built Gallows**

As you read the previous paragraph, one wonders why Haman had to be present. One suspects that he must have wondered the same thing. Esther insisted that he be present, but she spoke to the king as though Haman were not present.

The author finally turned his attention to Haman's response to this series of events.

*Haman went out that day happy and in high spirits. But when he saw Mordecai at the king's gate and observed that he neither rose nor showed fear in his presence, he was filled with rage against Mordecai. Esther 5:9*

Haman is a study in contrast in this verse. He honestly did not know what Esther was doing. Apparently, he thought that it had to involve him and it had to be good from his point of view. The word “happy” is “samach” (סָמַח) and means “bright faced,” “gleeful,” “re-joicing.” He was on top of the world and he knew that a great benefit for him was about to be announced. The author also said that Haman was “in high spirits.” This is literally “good heart.” It is to be so happy that you are unaware of anything around you.

Put yourself in Haman’s position. You are coming out of the queen’s palace walking on air; certain that you do not have a care in the world and suddenly you see Mordecai, and he doesn’t even seem to notice that you are passing by. He does not bow; he does not seem appropriately cautious in your presence. He completely ignored you, and you are second only to the king of the greatest empire in the world of that day. The law of the king demanded that everyone in the realm must bow in your presence, but Mordecai pays no attention to you whatsoever. Here you have the two absolute extremes in the emotions of Haman. He went from the heights of joy to the depths of anger and frustration. The word “rage” is “chemah” (חֵמָה). He already hated Mordecai both because he was a Jew and because he did not give Haman the respect that his insecurity demanded. It is impossible to adequately describe the extent of Haman’s rage. There is something about rage that immediately follows exuberant joy and gleeful excitement that makes it all the more volatile.

Observe also that this verse says, “...nor showed fear in his presence.” The word “fear” is really “zuwa” (זָוָה) and means “to tremble with fear,” “to be frightened to the point of agitation.” It can also mean “to shake uncontrollably because of fear.” It made Haman furious that his very presence did not cause Mordecai to be out of control with fear. People who are addicted to power are affected by their inability to cause fear the way a drug addict reacts to drug deprivation - no price is too high to meet that inner demand. That is the way Haman reacted at the sight of a calm Mordecai.

Mordecai seemed to be an immovable object in Haman’s life. This usually is impossible for the power hungry to understand. They expect everyone to tremble at their power.

There is a contrast between 5:9 and 5:10

*Nevertheless, Haman restrained himself and went home. Calling together his friends and Zeresh, his wife, Esther 5:10*

The name of Haman’s wife is Zeresh. This name comes from the Avetan language. This is an ancient language from the area we know as Iran. Haman, an Agagite - Amalekite, married a woman who was Persian. This was probably a political gift. He could have had a wife from among the Amalekites. It would be his choice. He apparently chose to have a Persian wife in the hope that this would be a political advantage for him. This was the case with many enslaved men who were brought into the government.

In the Hebrew text, the word is “but,” instead of “nevertheless.” It identifies a strong contrast. That contrast looks something like this:



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5:9	5:10
Haman was angry enough to do almost anything to make Mordecai bow down and tremble with fear.	Haman was able to restrain himself.

The word “restrain” is “aphaq” (אָפּהאַק) and means “to contain,” “to restrain oneself.” It was used to describe emotions so strong that it took all one’s strength to keep them under control. Haman was barely able to keep from giving in to his urge to kill Mordecai and lose the opportunity to kill the whole nations of Jews.

Observe what Haman did after he restrained his anger. The text says that he did three things:

1. He went home.
2. **“Calling together his friends.”** The word “calling together,” is “bowe” (בֹּוֹא) and means “to carry,” “to get,” “to send for,” “to provide a way.” The intent is that Haman provided transportation to bring his friends to his home. Now, the friends of the second in command of the world’s greatest empire would have chariots of their own. Haman was throwing a massive party. He was convinced he was about to receive a great honor and he could not wait until it was announced to share it with his friends. You may remember that it was suggested earlier these elaborate feasts were intended to impress people who were important and powerful. That was certainly the case in this instance.
3. **“and Zeresh his wife”** - The way the sentence is worded makes it sound as though he had to provide transportation both for his friends and his wife. That was probably not the case.

You may remember that it was a rare occasion when the women were invited to these celebrations. The mention of Haman’s wife as coming to the celebration suggests that it was an unusual display of joy and exhilaration. It is quite clear that the text does not say this.

Whatever else may have been on the agenda that evening, Haman was sharing his greatness with his friends.

*Haman boasted to them about his vast wealth, his many sons, and all the ways the king had honored him and how he had elevated him above the other nobles and officials. Esther 5:11*

In this verse, Haman gave four illustrations of just how great he had become:

1. **He “recounted unto them the glory of his riches.”** The word “recounted” is really “told” The Hebrew word is “saphar” (סָפַר) which means “to score,” “to enumerate,” “to celebrate,” “to make a count.” It is not so much that he wants to discover just how much he had. It is more that he wanted them to discover just how very much he had. Observe, also, that it was “the glory of his riches” that he wanted to brag about.

2. **“He recounted the multitude of his children”** - The Hebrew text deals with his **“sons.”** This would seem very strange to us. If we were invited to a party and the host did nothing but exalt about how many sons he had, we would be offended. Not so in the Near East. The number of sons a man had was as important as how much wealth he had. In fact, his sons would be considered the most important part of his wealth.
3. **“All the things wherein the king had promoted him”** - We must remember that Haman was an Agagite, an Amalekite. Like David, he started out as a nobody and rose to the top. It appears that he recounted every promotion he had received along the way. We are offended by just the thought of this. We must remember that it is not different from what we hear from candidates at election time. In one sense that is what he was doing, along with celebrating his good fortune.
4. **“He (the king) advanced him above the princes and servants of the king”** - It is possible that Haman was one of the princes. Whatever the case, Haman had been elevated to a position above all of the seven princes, the top leaders of the empire. There was a large administrative body called **“the servants of the king.”** These men, like Mordecai and Daniel before him, ran the country on behalf of the king. Haman had probably been one of them at an earlier time. Now, however, he had been promoted over everyone except the king. Tonight he was celebrating that great achievement. Again, this would offend us, but it was acceptable among the people of that day.

Haman was not finished with his proud display:

*"And that's not all," Haman added. "I'm the only person Queen Esther invited to accompany the king to the banquet she gave. And she has invited me along with the king tomorrow." Esther 5:12*

People of lesser social status often long for the popularity and shared company of those in the limelight whom they will never equal. Haman's bragging dealt with at least two things:

- **He was invited to a wine banquet by the queen.** Few could boast of such an honor.
- **It was exclusive** - no one but the king and Haman had been invited. It was like saying to his friends, **“None of you have been invited to be the exclusive guest of the Queen with the King.”** Haman's pleasure with his achievements could hardly be exaggerated.

It is quite clear, however, that earlier achievements were not enough.

*But all this gives me no satisfaction as long as I see that Jew Mordecai sitting at the king's gate." Esther 5:13*

In the Hebrew text, the word **“but”** is **“and.”** The sense of the sentence, however, is well served by the contrast. Before we read the verse, it is clear that there is a change in the direction of the story. Notice the change in mood to be observed in Haman. Having exalted most of evening in his achievements, now a twinge of bitterness forces its way through his memory.

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We take nothing away from Haman. He was a highly honored man. In his mind, his hatred of Mordecai and the awareness that this Jew was a governmental official was more important than any achievement. His achievements hold no real satisfaction for him so long as Mordecai retained a position in the administrative body of the empire. This is an unusual level of growing bitterness and hatred.

There is a hint in the text concerning at least one reason for this celebration.

*His wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, "Have a gallows built, seventy-five feet high, and ask the king in the morning to have Mordecai hanged on it. Then go with the king to the dinner and be happy." This suggestion delighted Haman, and he had the gallows built. Esther 5:14*

Some have thought of this verse as a statement by Haman's wife, Zeresh. The text clearly indicates that she was involved in the suggested solution. The text also indicates that the other guests agreed and supported the suggestion. There are some possible scenarios concerning this verse:

1. It is possible that they were already of the same mind and participated in the development of Haman's scheme to eliminate all Jews.
2. It is possible that this was a new idea which they supported because of their friendship with Haman.
3. It is possible that they, too, were Agagites who despised Jews even before the events with Mordecai developed.
4. It is possible that they were promising young diplomats who were fond of Haman because of his position and the opportunities he could open for them.

The text does not tell us, therefore we deal with conjecture. A reasonable guess seems to be numbers one and three or a combination of the two. For one thing, there is no indication that Haman had to defend his attitudes. These people made the suggestion, not Haman.

It is clear in the text that their motives were more than finding a way to get rid of Mordecai. The word translated "gallows" is "ets" (עץ) which means "tree." This was the word usually used to describe a cross. It can also describe a gallows, but not usually. Gallows or cross, it was formed from wood and was very firm. It had to be constructed, but the construction did not take a lot of time. It was finished the next day. This seems to favor making a cross from a standing tree.

This "gallows" was 50 cubits high. A cubit was approximately 18 inches high. That would make this structure approximately 75 feet high. If the sole purpose of this vehicle of death was to kill Mordecai, then it could have been adequate at ten feet high. The additional height was for show. It seems clear that they wanted the whole world to know that Mordecai was dead. Perhaps they wanted to make an example of him lest others get the same idea about not bowing to Haman. It is more likely that they wanted it to be known that this Jew was no longer able to flaunt himself before Haman.

The words of Haman's wife and friends were cold and heartless. Notice what they said to Haman:

*"Then go with the king to the dinner and be happy." Esther 5:14b*

It is difficult to imagine a person being able to execute an enemy and then "be happy" with the king at a banquet. The word "happy" is "samach" ( סָמַח ) and means "to be gleeful," "to be filled with glee," "to rejoice." It is to achieve a level of joy and excitement which is unparalleled. This is just one piece of evidence which suggests that these friends hated the Jews in general and Mordecai in particular as much as Haman did.

Haman was delighted" with the suggestion. The word "delighted" is "yatab" ( יָטַב ) "something sound," "something beautiful," "to make well," "to make sweet." Haman was so excited that he had become so close to the king that he forgot the king's commandment that all the Jews were to be killed on a later date. Haman had the instrument of death erected that very day. It did not dawn on him that his excitement had clouded his careful attention to do exactly as the king commanded. The building of the "gallows" was a direct act of disobedience concerning the law that he had prepared for the king's signature.

### **Conclusion**

Again, we must ask ourselves what we can see in this chapter that suggests the action of God.

1. Esther's commitment to God and her people could be effective because she, though a Jew, was the Queen of Persia. She was in a strong position to have a strong influence on the actions of the king.
2. The fact that she obtained favor of Xerxes when she violated his law by coming uninvited to his throne room suggests that God was active in this experience.
3. The king was willing to be brought into Esther's scheme. It really seemed as though she was playing games with them. This would never have happened otherwise.
4. God allowed Haman to feel so important that it never dawned on him to be careful for his life in this experience of intrigue.

## QUESTIONS FOR ESTHER LESSON 6

### ESTHER 6:1 - 14

#### MORDECAI WAS FINALLY HONORED

1. In Esther chapter six, there are two paragraphs. On the following table, write a summary of seven words or less for each paragraph.

6:1-9	
6:10-14	

2. In Esther 6:1-9, Haman was caught in a trap of his own making.
- In 6:1, the king had a problem.
    - What was the problem?
    - How did Xerxes solve the problem?
  - In 6:2, Xerxes made an important discovery.
    - What was that discovery?
    - How did Xerxes discover that information?
  - In 6:3, Xerxes struggled with his discovery.
    - What question did he ask?
    - How did the king respond afterwards?
  - In 6:4, the king changed his line of questioning.
    - To what did he change it?
    - Xerxes had a visitor in the night. Who was he?
    - What did he want?
    - What would have been wrong with this?
  - In 6:5, Xerxes invited Haman into the throne room.
    - What happened?
    - What is the problem with this?
    - What time of day was this?
  - In 6:6, the king questioned Haman.
    - Why was this unusual?
    - What did Xerxes ask Haman?
    - What did Haman assume from this question?
  - In 6:7, 8, Haman answered the king's question.
    - What did Haman say to the king?
    - Does this remind you of anything?
  - In 6:9, Haman continued to answer the question of the king.
    - What did this answer tell the king?
    - Do you see any problem with this?
3. In Esther 6:10-14, the author describes Mordecai's exaltation and Haman's mourning.
- In 6:10, the king responded to Haman.
    - What did he do?
    - What would Haman gather from this?

## STANDING ALONE, BUT NEVER LONELY

- (3). If you were Haman, how would you respond to the king's decision?
- b. In 6:11, Haman was busy carrying out the wishes of the king.
  - (1). What did he have to do?
  - (2). How would this affect Haman?
  - (3). How would people understand this situation?
- c. In 6:12, Mordecai responded to the king's choice.
  - (1). What did Mordecai do?
  - (2). What does this tell us about Mordecai?
  - (3). The verse also describes Haman's response. What was it?
  - (4). How did he express it?
- 4. Reread the chapter carefully. Record places in this chapter where you see God at work even though His name is not mentioned.

## LESSON 6: – ESTHER 6:1 – 14

### MORDECAI WAS FINALLY HONORED

#### Introduction

In Esther chapter six, there are two paragraphs. They are summarized on the following table.

6:1-9	Haman Traps Himself
6:10-14	Mordecai Exalted While Haman Mourns

#### Esther 6:1-9 - Haman Traps Himself

The scene shifts from Haman's house to the palace.

*That night the king could not sleep; so he ordered the book of the chronicles, the record of his reign, to be brought in and read to him. Esther 6:1*

The author attempted to give two simultaneous pictures. While Haman, his wife and friends were deciding the way to get rid of Mordecai, Xerxes was having a difficult time sleeping.

The king commanded that the "book of the chronicles" be brought to him. Actually, there are two books in every kingdom.

- **The book of remembrance** - This was kept by the king. It detailed the king's personal diary and his glorious accomplishments.
- **The book of records** - This was kept by the prime minister, in this case, Haman. This book detailed the nation's history.

In this instance, the king called for the book of remembrance. The text tells us that the book was read to him, but it does not say why. We will say more about this later.

An interesting thing happened in the course of the reading.

*It was found recorded there that Mordecai had exposed Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's officers who guarded the doorway, who had conspired to assassinate King Xerxes. Esther 6:2*

This is the first mention of this event since 2:19-23. It is clear that the king knew about the experience because he was the one who had passed sentence upon the two guards. We know that the fact that Mordecai was the one who protected the king by informing him of the plot attracted Xerxes' attention. The text does not tell us why. He certainly would not forget about this very important incident that saved his life.

The king continued to think about the information he had just received.

*"What honor and recognition has Mordecai received for this?" the king asked.  
"Nothing has been done for him," his attendants answered. Esther 6:3*

We wondered earlier why Xerxes did nothing to reward Mordecai for his faithfulness to the king and for his bravery. This is our first inkling about why it happened this way. The

wording in verse two suggests that this was new information for Xerxes, though it does not say that. This does not tell us why he was unaware of this serious oversight.

- Some suggest that Haman arranged to have the name of Xerxes' benefactor concealed altogether. This is doubtful since it was discoverable when the account was read to the king, and it obviously would be read to him.
- Some others suggest that it was recorded in this book, but not reported to Xerxes. This can pose a problem because the king expressed no surprise when it was reported that Mordecai did this. This does not mean that he was not surprised. It could be that he was keeping his own counsel because he was beginning to wonder what was happening. Had he known the answer, however, he would never have asked the question.
- More pointedly, it is possible that Haman somehow reported to the king that this discovery was his own doing, but recorded the truth in the king's journal. That would be very risky, but possible. You will remember that it was almost immediately after this attempted coup was reported that Haman was elevated to the second-in-command. This came as a total surprise and without explanation.

This had to come as a serious shock to the king. It would be a major error to let such a great gift go unrewarded. If he had, no one would ever again take the risk of informing him that his life was in danger. The fact that he asked this question shows that he was definitely in favor of rewarding such a loyal subject.

When the servants informed Xerxes that nothing had been done to honor Mordecai, observe that the king made no comment at all.

The scene changes suddenly in the following verse.

*The king said, "Who is in the court?" Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the palace to speak to the king about hanging Mordecai on the gallows he had erected for him. Esther 6:4*

The text gives no indication of why the king suddenly turned his attention to "the court." Remember that this is a time when people normally would be asleep. There are some possibilities concerning the king's question:

- He may have heard a noise and wondered who would be in the palace at this time of the night.
- He may have begun to put pieces together and suspected that something was happening of which he was not fully aware.
- Kings and dictators seem to be suspicious, even paranoid about their own safety. Certainly there is good reason for such paranoia.

It appears that the second suggestion is more appropriate.

It had to be quite a surprise to find anyone in the court at this time of night. This fact would tend to heighten the king's concerns.



## MORDECAI WAS FINALLY HONORED

The author indicated that Haman had come to the court, "... to speak to the king about hanging Mordecai on the gallows that he had prepared for him." There are at least two serious problems with Haman's actions:

- No matter how important it is, it would not be appropriate to wake the king in the middle of the night to talk about it.
- It would not be wise to build the gallows first and then ask the king to use them to execute your enemy. This would be problematic for two reasons:
  1. It would seem to the king, that you were making the decision and asking him to rubber-stamp it. Kings had ultimate authority and wanted everyone to know it. Anything that would detract from this image of ultimate power was viewed as a threat against the throne.
  2. To build the gallows first and then ask the king to use them would be viewed by the king as an attempt by Haman, the second most powerful man in the realm, to take over the throne. It would be viewed as subterfuge which would eventually place the king on the gallows rather than Haman's announced enemy.

Both of these possibilities would mean death for Haman. It appears that he had become so preoccupied with his hatred of Mordecai that he failed to use proper care and forethought that his own precarious position demanded.

There is an ominous atmosphere that develops at this point in the story.

*His attendants answered, "Haman is standing in the court." "Bring him in," the king ordered. Esther 6:5*

The words of the servants seem almost confused. It is as though they were confused, as though they too wondered what Haman was doing there at that hour.

Notice the way the servants made their report to the king. "Haman is standing in the court." The word "court" is "chatser" (חֲצֵר) and means "an enclosure," "a court outside the throne room." It is the same word the author used to describe the location where Esther came when she wanted an audience with the king, but had no invitation. It is clear to the servants, and now to Xerxes as well, that Haman desired an audience with the king in the middle of the night.

One might assume that this was almost as confusing to the king as it was to his servants: almost, but not quite. No matter how confusing it may have been, still the king instructed the servants, "Let him come in." There is nothing in the instruction to tell us how the king felt or what he thought about this unusual turn of events. We will have more to say about this later.

Again the scene changes. Haman has come into the presence of the king.

*When Haman entered, the king asked him, "What should be done for the man the king delights to honor?" Now Haman thought to himself, "Who is there that the king would rather honor than me?" Esther 6:6*

Observe that the king did not allow Haman to even tell him why he had come to the court. Xerxes immediately asked Haman a leading question: "What should be done for the man the king delights to honor?" The question was simple and straight forward. As you can see, Xerxes did not mislead Haman. He simply did not give the name of the man he had in mind.

Haman was preoccupied with his own importance and his hatred of Mordecai. These problems had caused Haman to make errors on at least two previous occasions. Now he was making the same mistake again. As he considered the king's question, Haman made a lethal assumption. This was expressed in his statement, to himself, "Who is there that the king would rather honor than me?" This is a very natural mistake for a person consumed with self importance. Pride allowed him to think the king had to be talking about him.

Armed with this false assumption, Haman answered the king's question.

*So he answered the king, "For the man the king delights to honor, have them bring a royal robe the king has worn and a horse the king has ridden, one with a royal crest placed on its head." Esther 6:7-8*

Haman knew how to do things in the best possible way. Down through the centuries, people have counted it an honor to associate with kings in a variety of ways. Louis XIV had an elaborate array of ways to honor people by allowing one to help him put on his boot and another to help him put on his coat, etc. Haman described an honor for himself like none the kingdom had ever experienced before.

In verse eight, Haman suggested that the king have his servants bring a royal robe that the king has worn and a horse that the king has ridden. To add greater honor to an unimaginable bestowal, Haman suggested that the robe and horse be delivered to the most noble prince in the realm.

*"Then let the robe and horse be entrusted to one of the king's most noble princes. Let them robe the man the king delights to honor, and lead him on the horse through the city streets, proclaiming before him, 'This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!'" Esther 6:9*

This prince was to place the robe on this most honored man. This prince, one of the most powerful men in the empire, was to lead the honored man through the streets of Susa riding on the king's horse. Add to this, the most noble prince was to serve as a herald to tell the people of the city, "This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor." Wow! Now, Haman has again shown some devious skills. It is good for a king to demonstrate how he honors people who serve him well. It gives the people of the capital city a good impression of the king.

There are several serious problems with Haman's suggestions:

- With the exception of the announcement to be heralded by the "most noble prince," this was a description of a coronation. It was the princes who placed the royal robes on the new king and placed the crown on his head.
- It was illegal for anyone to wear the king's royal robes. There were specific attire for every level of government, but no one could wear the royal robe of the king.

## MORDECAI WAS FINALLY HONORED

- It was illegal for anyone to ride a horse on which the king had ridden. Haman also indicated that this horse should bear “the royal crest on its head.” When a king rode in procession, the crest/crown on the horse's head identified the rider as the king. It would be a crime punishable by death for anyone else to ride this horse in this way.
- It was an honor reserved for the king and his viceroy/prime minister to be heralded as they rode in procession. It was a punishable crime for anyone else to do this.

If you think of this response for a moment, Haman described, with one exception the coronation ceremony. It appears that the message Haman suggested for the prince to herald through the streets was chosen carefully to keep the king from thinking Haman wanted his job. It appears that Haman's pride betrayed his inner longings to be the king.

### **Esther 6:10-14 - Mordecai Exalted While Haman Mourns**

There is a shocking shift in the story as we enter this paragraph. Remember, Haman had come to seek the cooperation of the king in hanging Mordecai on the gallows Haman had already erected. When he arrived, he was not allowed to request anything, but required to answer the king's question and offer advice concerning the way to honor someone in the court.

Hearing the advice of Haman, Xerxes responded with a command.

*"Go at once," the king commanded Haman. "Get the robe and the horse and do just as you have suggested for Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king's gate. Do not neglect anything you have recommended." Esther 6:10*

What a shock this had to be for Haman. It is hardly what he expected to hear from the king.

One could wish that the author of the book had been more specific concerning the time element. Was this still during the night? Was it now morning? We do not know. It seems as though the king would not send Haman to lead a procession to honor Mordecai while the people of Susa were still asleep. We should remember, also, that the capital was not known for early rising.

The king's command was specific, “Go at once.” Neither Xerxes nor the author gives any indication as to why there was urgency in the command.

- It may simply have been that he wanted to make sure that it was cared for.
- It may have been that the king felt it had already been too long that the concern of Mordecai for the king's safety had gone unrewarded.

From outward appearances, the latter suggestion seems more plausible.

Think, for a moment, about how you would feel if you were Haman. Not only was Mordecai to receive an unusual honor from the king, but you are the one who suggested it and you must carry it out. This suggests a level of anger and frustration that is almost impossible to measure.

Again, if you are Haman, you made the suggestions for honor thinking about yourself. You knew there was no one in the whole empire the king would rather honor than yourself.

Suddenly you discover that you are not going to receive the honor, but your worst enemy, and a Jewish man at that, is going to receive the honor you designed. This would raise almost uncontrollable feelings of shock, rage and confusion within you.

Add to that the fact that the king and Mordecai are now very close and they both know that you have prepared an extermination plan for a whole race of people. This would stir up unparalleled feelings of fear within you.

You dread being forced to serve as the herald for the one man in the world you hate most. The people of Susa will laugh at your demotion. The whole court will know that Mordecai refused to honor you; he is now your superior and they will laugh and scorn your downfall. This was a terrible moment in the life of Haman.

Notice the way Xerxes identified Mordecai - "Mordecai the Jew." How did he know that Mordecai was a Jew? Did he figure that out for himself? Did the servants tell him? Is it possible that Xerxes knew about the plan all along, but played along just to see how far Haman would go with his greed for power and revenge? It is doubtful if he knew from the beginning. That would be too risky. Xerxes was ruthless, but a shrewd politician. It is reasonable to think that he figured it out at least by this time and allowed Haman to write his own political obituary.

The king instructed Haman, "Do not neglect anything you have recommended." The king would know for certain that just about everything he instructed Haman to do would be something that he would be eager to neglect altogether.

Look, for a moment, at Haman's position. You were certain that you were the right-hand-man of the king. You come to the king to get his approval for a plan to hang your worst enemy on the gallows that you have already prepared. You prepared an honor plan for the king to bestow upon you. You are shocked to discover that the king is going to bestow that plan on your worst enemy and he has commanded you to carry this out. If Haman carried it out, he would be installing his worst enemy in the position he had held until this moment. Now, Mordecai would have the power over him that he had had over Mordecai. Mordecai could command him to bow down as he had commanded Mordecai in the past. People and politicians would laugh at Haman. Whereas he was threatening to destroy Mordecai and all his people, now he was in line to experience that same devastation.

Haman was in a compromising position. If he obeyed the king, he would be devastated and totally humiliated. If he disobeyed the king, he would die. His only solution was to obey grudgingly.

*So Haman got the robe and the horse. He robed Mordecai, and led him on horseback through the city streets, proclaiming before him, "This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!" Esther 6:11*

Put yourself in Haman's position. Look at what he had to do and imagine yourself under these conditions.

- Haman put the royal robes on Mordecai, his mortal enemy, when he had planned this honor for himself. He knew that he was installing Mordecai in the position that he, Haman, had previously filled. This would produce feelings of outrage, un-

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relenting frustration, dashed hopes and dreams. Over and over in his mind, he must have been saying, “This should have been me. This isn’t fair!”

- Haman led Mordecai through the streets of Susa on horseback. It was one of the horses reserved for the king’s use; a horse every man in the kingdom would long to ride. The insignia of the king was clearly visible on the head of this tremendous animal. It would be clear to all that this man was receiving a very special honor from the king. If your name was Haman, you would be thinking that this isn’t fair. I should be the one receiving this honor. You would also be deeply humiliated to think that you were once in total control of Mordecai’s life and now you are forced to serve as his slave, his herald.
- That isn’t all. What you thought you were suggesting for yourself, you are forced to perform for the despised Jew, Mordecai. Certainly Haman would hang his head as he shouted for all to hear, “This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor.” The bitter words must have stuck in his throat. Haman had to be frustrated beyond belief. He had to want to shout these words with bitterness and insults. Because of his compromised position, he had to shout them in pretended joy and celebration. The fury and anger of this humiliating experience had to devastate this **former** official. The mockery of the crowds and officials, expected or real, had to further humiliate a broken man.

Now focus the spotlight on Mordecai. This whole episode came to him as a total surprise. The last he knew, he was struggling to stay alive and protect his people. Suddenly he was summoned to the palace and a royal robe was placed upon him by the man before whom he stoutly refused to bow and give respect. He was placed upon a powerful horse, reserved for the king’s use, and paraded through the streets of the capital city. Only yesterday he lurched through these same streets wailing in sackcloth and ashes. Now the man who hated him most was his servant and herald. Haman ushered his new master through the city crying both words and tears together, “This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor.”

Surprise was probably Mordecai’s most obvious response. He would be an unusual man if he felt no joy or satisfaction as a result of this honor. He knew that Haman, the Agagite, had authored the design to kill him and his people. There had to be a feeling of joy and relief that this cloud of terror had been removed. It would be even more unusual if he did not rejoice, to some extent, that his mortal enemy, and more importantly, the enemy of God was subdued.

Underlying all of his feelings had to be a raging current of confusion. Why the change? Yesterday I wailed in sackcloth and ashes; today I am paraded in honor at the king’s command. Yesterday my life was about to be destroyed with all the Jews. Today, I have received **the** honored position next to the king. Why? What has Esther done? How did she arrange this?

Interestingly, the author did not comment on Mordecai’s reaction to this shocking turn of events.

*Afterward Mordecai returned to the king's gate. But Haman rushed home, with his head covered in grief, Esther 6:12*

## STANDING ALONE, BUT NEVER LONELY

It simply says that he returned to the king's gate, the place where he had served the king up until this time.

There are two contrasts between Mordecai and Haman to which we need to give our attention:

Afterward Mordecai returned to the king's gate Esther 6:12a	But Haman rushed home, with his head covered in grief Esther 6:12b
Mordecai received the greatest honor it was possible to receive in the Persian kingdom. The author recorded that he returned to the place where he had served the king up until this honor was bestowed upon him.	<p>Haman hurried home.</p> <p>a. <b>He was mourning.</b> The word "mourning" is "abel" (אָבֵל) which means "to seriously mourn," "to lament. This is intense sorrow.</p> <p>b. He covered his head - This was the symbol of intense humiliation.</p>

This is an interesting reversal of circumstances. Up until this day, Mordecai was wailing in sackcloth and ashes while Haman proudly boasted about his accomplishments. Now the sorrow has changed directions.

There is another contrast between Haman and Mordecai that we need to observe.

Spurred on by the king's command, the couriers went out, and the edict was issued in the citadel of Susa. The king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Susa was bewildered. Esther 3:15 The word "bewildered" is "buwk" (בִּיכָה) "perplexed," "entangled."	"Afterward Mordecai returned to the king's gate. But Haman rushed home, with his head covered in grief," Esther 6:12 The word grief is "abel" (אָבֵל) - "bewail."
<p>Haman celebrated in anticipation of victories that he had not yet realized.</p> <p>a. He celebrated the annihilation of all Jews nearly a year before it was to take place.</p> <p>b. He celebrated with wife and friends the promotion in government that he was certain he would receive.</p> <p>His advances were the product of his political wrangling.</p>	<p>Mordecai apparently did not celebrate at all.</p> <p>a. He did not know in advance that he would be honored.</p> <p>b. He was honored.</p> <p>c. He returned to the king's gate, the place where he had served the king faithfully.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. There was no rejoicing at the fall of others.</li> <li>2. There was no boasting of position to be received.</li> </ol> <p>His advances were a gift, earned, but not sought.</p>

As we indicated earlier, there is a serious contrast between these two men all the way through the book of Esther.

## MORDECAI WAS FINALLY HONORED

The scene changes again.

*and told Zeresh his wife and all his friends everything that had happened to him. His advisers and his wife Zeresh said to him, "Since Mordecai, before whom your downfall has started, is of Jewish origin, you cannot stand against him -- you will surely come to ruin!" Esther 6:13*

The author focused our attention on Haman's household again. Though the text does not say, it appears that Haman's wife, Zeresh, and his friends were still at his home. If so, they were probably waiting to see the joyful outcome of his request to hang Mordecai.

When Haman arrived at his home, he told his wife and friends of the tragedy which had befallen him. You may remember that in 5:14, it mentions "Zeresh and his friends," when the advice was given to approach the king. This suggests that Zeresh was the one who urged his plan the most.

Now in 6:14, the text speaks of "the wise men and Zeresh." This suggests a turning away from the advice of Zeresh because the advice she gave caused great trouble for him. It would be hard to imagine how devastated Haman was after this humiliating experience. The sorrow, anger, humiliation and disappointment he had endured came pouring out to those closest to him.

The verse closes with the words of "his advisers and his wife." In the Hebrew text, it is "his wise men and his wife." Notice the advice they offered, "Since Mordecai, before whom your downfall has started, is of Jewish origin, you cannot stand against him." They expressed some strong understandings. The reason they gave that Haman could not stand was not that Mordecai was a great politician, but because he was of Jewish origin. This is interesting. Up until this day, being a Jewish person was detrimental. Now the Jews were beginning to realize that it was not that they were of Jewish nationality, but because they worshipped the God of Israel. Though God is not mentioned, that is the direction of their thinking. The Jewish people understood God to be irresistible.

Though the words of Haman's advisers were few, the implications were immense.

- **"before whom your downfall has started..."** This suggests that he had only seen the beginning of a tragic scenario. This was just the first episode in his fall from power and favor. It was going to get much worse and very soon.
- **"You cannot stand against him."** - They knew that Haman would struggle to defeat Mordecai, but they were saying that when all was said and done, Haman would be defeated and Mordecai would end up in the place of power and privilege. It was a way of saying, there is no possible way that you can survive. It is hard to imagine how devastated Haman would feel when just one day previously he was convinced that there was no one in the entire kingdom that the king would rather honor than himself.

### Conclusion

As we come to the close of the chapter, we again want to look to see how the author has identified the fact that God was active within the chapter.

## STANDING ALONE, BUT NEVER LONELY

1. The king was sleepless. Because of this he discovered that Mordecai had never been honored. Without this, he would have never found out about this great blunder.
2. Haman was so eager to kill Mordecai that he came to the court during the night. This would arouse suspicion.
3. God allowed Haman to think the king meant him when he said, “the man the king delights to honor.” In so doing, Haman was suggesting the total honor for Mordecai. Haman would, then, have to carry it out.



## QUESTIONS FOR ESTHER LESSON 7

### ESTHER 7:1 - 10

#### HAMAN HANGED ON HIS OWN GALLOWS

1. There is only one paragraph in Esther chapter seven. On the following table, write a summary of seven words or less.

7:1-10	
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2. In Esther 7:1, 2, Xerxes and Haman came to the banquet with Esther.
  - a. We have discussed the way Esther addressed Xerxes. Look carefully at these verses.
    - (1).How did Xerxes address Esther?
    - (2).What does this tell you?
  - b. What did the king have on his mind? Why?
  - c. Notice the way the king prefaced his question.
    - (1).What did he do?
    - (2).Compare 7:2 with 5:6. What did you discover?
3. In 7:3, Esther identified both her petition and her request.
  - a. What was her petition?
  - b. What was her request?
  - c. Notice the way Esther prefaces her remarks to Xerxes.
    - (1).How did she preface her remarks?
    - (2).What did this tell you about Esther?
  - d. Esther framed her request and petition in a certain way.
    - (1).How did she frame this petition/request?
    - (2).Why would she do this?
4. In 7:4, Esther spells out the generalized statement of her request given in verse three.
  - a. How did she describe it?
  - b. Compare the emotional tone of Esther's words here with other statements she made previously.
  - c. Esther used three different words to describe the pending tragedy.
    - (1).What were these words?
    - (2).Why were three different words necessary?
  - d. Esther, also, identified a less traumatic situation.
    - (1).What situation did she identify?
    - (2).What did she say about it?
    - (3).What purpose is served by this reference?
5. In 7:5, Xerxes responded to Esther.
  - a. How did he respond?
  - b. What was the emotional tone of his reply?
6. In 7:6, Esther identified the predator.
  - a. Read her response carefully. With what three words did she identify her enemy?

## STANDING ALONE, BUT NEVER LONELY

- (1). What does each word mean?
  - (2). Why would three descriptive words be necessary?
- b. How did Haman respond to her words? Why?
7. In 7:7, both Xerxes and Haman reacted to Esther's statement.
  - a. Think carefully about what the king did.
    - (1). What did he do?
    - (2). What were the implications of this action?
    - (3). What would Esther gather from this response?
  - b. Think carefully about Haman's response.
    - (1). What did he do?
    - (2). What did he fail to do?
    - (3). Evaluate the wisdom of his thinking?
8. In 7:8, Haman acted upon his reaction to Esther's surprising attack.
  - a. What did he do?
  - b. What good could this do him?
  - c. How did Xerxes evaluate Haman's actions?
  - d. How did Xerxes express his shock?
  - e. "They," (apparently the guards), did something.
    - (1). What did they do?
    - (2). Why did they do it?
    - (3). What did it mean?
9. In 7:9, the king's guard, Harbona, spoke up.
  - a. What did he say?
  - b. Why would he say this?
  - c. What was his suggestion?
  - d. What was Xerxes' response?
  - e. There is a hint, in this verse, of just how strongly Xerxes felt about his command. What is that hint?
  - f. Harbona identified Mordecai in a specific way.
    - (1). How did he identify Mordecai?
    - (2). What did this mean?
10. In 7:10, the author described the death of Haman. Notice the way the author described the hanging.
  - a. What implication can be drawn from the way the author reported Haman's death.
  - b. The author, also, described Xerxes' response to the execution. Describe this response in your own words.
11. Read the chapter again. Record the places in this chapter where you see the hand of God at work without the mention of His name.

## LESSON 7: – ESTHER 7:1 – 10

### HAMAN HANGED ON HIS OWN GALLOWS

#### Introduction

There is only one paragraph in this chapter. Therefore, the title of the chapter and the paragraph are the same.

#### Esther 7:1 - 10 - Haman Hanged on His Own Gallows

The chapter begins as Xerxes and Haman arrive for the wine banquet.

*So the king and Haman went to dine with Queen Esther, Esther 7:1*

As indicated earlier, this was a wine banquet, not a lavish meal. It was a banquet of wine. It would be a casual, relaxed time over wine and casual food. Haman, much to his consternation, was brought to this meeting by the king. This should have been a great honor for Haman. He did not know what was happening, but he knew that it was not good for him.

Esther had promised that she would tell the king at this gathering the nature of her request and petition. The king was eager to find out what was so important to her that she would risk her life to share it with him.

*and as they were drinking wine on that second day, the king again asked, "Queen Esther, what is your petition? It will be given you. What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted." Esther 7:2*

If you go back to Esther 5:3, you will see that though the king still does not know the nature of Esther's request, his offer remained the same. It is not so much that he is anxious to give away half of his kingdom as it is that he wants her to be assured he is determined to be generous with her.

Though she was totally in command of the situation, Esther did not forget her place; she did not forget to offer due respect to the king.

*Then Queen Esther answered, "If I have found favor with you, O king, and if it pleases your majesty, grant me my life -- this is my petition. And spare my people -- this is my request..." Esther 7:3*

Notice that Esther used essentially the same preface she had used in 5:8. This gives us a hint concerning her general attitude and decorum. She gave serious conditions on which her request and petition was to be considered:

"If I have found favor with you, O king"

"If it pleases your majesty."

Though this had life and death importance to her, Esther was able to present her cause at the good judgment of the king. This requires great trust in the king, but especially in God. Even though her life depended upon it, Esther had that faith.

You may have noticed that it is almost as though someone else spoke instead of Esther in the middle of this verse. Gone is the relaxed, casual demeanor. There is drive and determination in her voice that we had not seen previously. All the fire of her personality was present as she said, "...Grant me my life - this is my petition. And spare my people - this is my request."

Put yourself in the place of Haman for a moment. You came to this event in fear and trembling and now suddenly you hear the queen attack you before the king. She did not mention your name, but in your condition, she did not need to do so. It was clear that you were the one about to be judged. Haman had to be devastated, totally terrorized.

As you read these words of Esther, your eyebrows furrow and your chin drops as the exclamation "wow!" escapes your lips. I suspect that this was precisely the response of Xerxes.

He must have wondered if this was the same courteous, soft spoken wife who had started the request. The question arises, Why did she add the two phrases, "This is my petition... this is my request."? You will remember that the king's promise to grant her request was stated in the terms she used in these two phrases - "request" and "petition." True to her approach to life, Esther applied pressure to the king by reminding him of his promise, which could not be rescinded, without ever saying so. It was clear that this was a quiet, but unflinching pressure applied to the king.

Suddenly, Esther is very direct. Xerxes and Haman have wondered for days what she had on her mind.

*"For I and my people have been sold for destruction and slaughter and annihilation. If we had merely been sold as male and female slaves, I would have kept quiet, because no such distress would justify disturbing the king." Esther 7:4*

Now the soft-spoken ways of the past are gone. Her words are abrupt and painfully clear. Esther's words were well chosen and they hit their mark with great accuracy. Note how she said it, "For I and my people have been sold for destruction and slaughter and annihilation." In these words, she accomplished two things:

- **She identified this tragedy against herself and her people.** This involved admitting openly that she was a Jew. This was another tremendous risk for her. After all, the king had signed the law that would exterminate this nation of people in his service. He could just as easily do nothing and she would die.
- **She pointed out that this represented a severe loss for the king as well.** This she did when she used the words, "I and my people have been sold for destruction..." This was a way of reminding the king that both he and Esther tended to lose, but Haman would lose nothing.

Esther's words were vivid and biting. She described the extermination in terms of "destruction." This word is "shamad," (שָׁמַד) which means "to totally devastate," "to leave completely desolate," "to bring to nothing," "to totally consume." We must remember that though her words were biting, they were true and not in the least overstated. She also described their plight as "slaughter." This is "harag" (הָרַג) which means "to murder," "to strike with deadly intent," "to slay with unusual force and devastation." Such words

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would cause the people to cringe, but she was not finished. She also called it “annihilation.” The word is “abad,” (אָבַד). It literally means “to wander away,” “to perish with no way to flee,” “to lose yourself.” Each of these descriptions suggests a devastation where nothing is left.

Esther was as direct as Haman was insincere. She quickly suggested two things for the king’s consideration:

- **If she and her people had been sold as slaves, she would have said nothing.** It was a way of saying she had been a slave and could handle being a slave again. She wanted Xerxes to know she was dealing with principle, not shrinking from a renewed life of slavery.
- **“No such distress would justify disturbing the king.”** The Hebrew text is worded in a slightly different way. It says, “the adversity is not equal to the king’s loss.” Whichever way you read it, Esther was pointing out to Xerxes that his own losses were greater than he may realize.

Add to this the fact that he would lose his queen in the process. It is clear that the king really loved Esther. Aside from this, there was a severe political loss which he could not afford to take. If Haman could get rid of the queen, it would send a message to power-watchers that Haman was far more powerful than they had realized and he really could take the throne from Xerxes. There was no way the king could allow this to happen.

It appears the king did not realize the identity of the man about whom Esther spoke. Notice how he responded to the accusation by Esther.

*King Xerxes asked Queen Esther, "Who is he? Where is the man who has dared to do such a thing?" Esther 7:5*

There are two ways to look at this verse:

- Xerxes honestly did not know the identity of the person Esther accused.
- Xerxes may have known who this was, but needed a specific accusation before he could take action against him.

In view of the king’s actions at the end of chapter six, it appears that he may already have surmised what was happening.

The king was obviously upset. His questions betray something of the intensity of his furor. Notice what he asked:

- **“Who is he?”** This is a direct question and would have been anticipated. There is no necessary indication of his rage here. This was a necessary first question.
- **“Where is the man who has dared to do such a thing?”** The Hebrew text is a bit stronger. It says, “Where this one who filled the heart to do this?” There is an important difference between the two texts. Our text suggests the identity of the one who would do such a terrible thing. The Hebrew text is stronger. It suggests that this planned action came as a deliberate decision growing out of a heart so filled with hate that it could not be defrayed. It deals with motive as well as the

identification of the one guilty of the atrocity. Does it sound to you as though the king already knows the answer to his harsh question?

Esther was ready with an answer to the king's question.

*Esther said, "The adversary and enemy is this vile Haman." Then Haman was terrified before the king and queen. Esther 7:6*

Esther chose three words to describe Haman before the king:

- **“adversary”** - This word is “tsar” (צַר) the word literally means “narrow,” “a tight place,” “an opponent who crowds you,” “trouble.”
- **“Enemy”** - The word is “ayab” (אֵיב) and means “to hate,” “to be hostile,” “to be an enemy.” This was a courageous statement for Esther to make. Haman was second in command of the greatest nation in the world. To speak of him as one who wants the king and queen to be destroyed is risky at best. That is precisely what Esther suggested.
- **“Vile”** - The word is “rah” (רַע) and means “good for nothing,” “bad,” “to be wicked.” This word suggests one who is like a rotten apple - not only rotten himself but assisting others to putrefy as well. Again, Esther took the risky course and identified Haman for what he really was.

Notice that she did not say these things privately behind Haman's back, but to his face in the presence of the king. This gives you an impression of the kind of character she had.

The author recorded the response of Haman in the close of verse six. Our text says, “Haman was terrified before the king and queen.” The word “terrified” is “baath” (בָּעַת) and means “to fear,” “to cause to tremble.” It is interesting that the one who was filled with rage because Mordecai was **not** so fearful of him that he trembled is now trembling in fear for his own life. Haman was trapped. He had endeared himself before the king as one who was really devoted to him and the kingdom. Now it came out that he had plotted against the king's wife. The queen could make terrible accusations against him and the king didn't even challenge her word. Haman knew that he was about to die.

The king was filled with rage. Notice how the author described it.

*The king got up in a rage, left his wine and went out into the palace garden. But Haman, realizing that the king had already decided his fate, stayed behind to beg Queen Esther for his life. Esther 7:7*

In that culture, the drinking of wine, together, was very significant. It was the way covenants were sealed. It was also the way friendships were symbolized. If a person took part in a wine feast, but did not drink the wine, it was considered an insult. The consequences of this would be severe. Observe that “in his rage” Xerxes “left his wine” and went out into the garden. He was so upset that he cast royal etiquette aside.

The word translated “rage” is “chamah” (חָמָה) and means “heat,” “to be poisoned with rage.” It is interesting to note that the king's rage, in 7:7, is precisely the same word the author used to describe Haman's “rage” in 5:9, when Mordecai refused to bow down and

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tremble in his presence. Jewish writers were fond of drawing such comparisons by using the same word to describe the rage of two different people, etc..

Observe that the king was so angry that he left the wine banquet and went to the palace garden. This was highly unusual conduct for the king. When a king was upset, he stayed his ground, let his rage spend itself and let others develop the ulcers. Xerxes, in his rage, simply went out into the palace garden, rather than acting on his emotion. What could motivate him to do this?

1. There may have been several motives, but certainly one of them was caution. He needed time to think.
2. The text does not explain the king's actions. Haman was a very powerful man. The king would need to think carefully about the consequences of any action that he might take. Though Haman had done a terrible thing, still he had a host of friends who like himself, wanted to climb the ladder of power at the expense of the king.
3. The previous threat to his life had been by two highly trusted personal guards of the king. He may have wondered if the guards who were present in the room were part of the plot Haman had masterminded.
4. It is possible that Xerxes was as angry with himself as he was with Haman because he had not seen through the plan Haman had gotten him to adopt.

Certainly, all of these conditions could have contributed to the king's unusual actions. We can not determine what really happened.

The text does not say how Esther reacted or thought when Xerxes expressed his rage. Some things would seem appropriate:

1. The fact that he responded with rage which was nearly out of control had to tell Esther that he was most sympathetic to her cause and would certainly take appropriate action.
2. On the other hand, whenever an absolute monarch expressed hostility which was nearly if not totally out of control, it was always a cause for concern or intense alarm. There were no boundaries he had to observe. He could give his violent emotions free reign without fear of reprisal.

The author then turned his attention to Haman again. Notice that this part begins with the word "but," which suggests a strong contrast is coming. The author drew a serious contrast between the pent up fury on the part of Xerxes and the throbbing fear which panicked Haman. Notice what the author said,

*"But Haman, realizing that the king had already decided his fate, stayed behind to beg queen Esther for his life." Esther 7:7b*

This sounds as though Haman's first impulse was to accompany the king. This would have been his normal responsibility. It was as though he had seen that there was absolutely no hope of persuading the king and he decided to see if Esther might be more approachable. What a mistake! Had he forgotten so quickly what she had just said about him?

The spotlight returned to the king, again.

*Just as the king returned from the palace garden to the banquet hall, Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was reclining. The king exclaimed, "Will he even molest the queen while she is with me in the house?" As soon as the word left the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face. Esther 7:8*

We do not know why the king stormed out into the garden. We, also, do not know why he came back to the feast when he did. We only know that when he returned he found Haman in what appeared to be a most compromising position. According to the text, Haman was intent on pleading for his life before Esther. Though it seems unreasonable, it appeared to Xerxes that Haman was about to take advantage of the queen. Xerxes' statement makes this thinking clear when he said,

*"Will he even molest the queen while she is with me in the house?" Esther 7:8b*

These painful words verify that Xerxes believed the very worst about Haman.

The last part of the verse removes all doubt about the situation.

*"As soon as the words left the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face." Esther 7:8c*

We know that it was customary for the people of that part of the world to cover the face of a prisoner who was going to be put to death. We do not know why the guards covered Haman's face at this point:

- Did they just assume that Haman was going to be put to death for what he had done? That is entirely possible. There was good evidence for that assumption.
- Was there a conversation exchange that was not recorded in the text? This is the greater possibility.

We do not know. It is more reasonable to assume that conversation was exchanged condemning Haman to death. It hardly seems possible that the guards presumed to do this since Haman was the second most powerful man in the kingdom. If they guessed wrong, they would die. Nevertheless, it is possible.

When Haman's head was covered, it was clear to all that he would die. There is an unusual element in this. The king had the power of life or death, but he usually refrained from using that power until he had conferred with the princes of the realm. In this instance, he did not do that, but made the decision on his own.

The scene shifts again; this time to the guards.

*Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs attending the king, said, "A gallows seventy-five feet high stands by Haman's house. He had it made for Mordecai, who spoke up to help the king." The king said, "Hang him on it!" Esther 7:9*

Because of this statement, it is assumed that Harbona was one of the guards who went to Haman's house to bring him to the feast. In this verse, a highly trusted guard for the king spoke up. His name was "Harbona." This name was from the Avetan language, which incidentally was the origin of the name of Haman's wife. You may remember in 1:10, Harbona was one of the seven guards sent to bring Vashti to the feast where Xerxes want-



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ed to display her beauty. People assume that Harbona had gone to Haman's home to bring him because this guard spoke up and told Xerxes about the 75 foot gallows that Haman had built at his home.

One wonders, why would the guard mention the gallows at this point? You may remember that in this culture they cover the head of a prisoner who was about to be hanged. Two other possibilities present themselves:

- Knowing that Haman was to be hanged, it could have been a suggestion of a quick and effective way to carry out the sentence.
- It could be that the guard finally put the pieces of the puzzle together and provided this information. It was a way of apprising the king of Haman's devious designs that he had discovered while bringing him to the feast.

Notice, also, that the guard, Harbona, said,

*"He had it made for Mordecai who spoke up to help the king." Esther 7:9b*

One wonders where the guard acquired this information. He may have overheard Haman bragging about the gallows, but the text doesn't say. Whatever the source, this information seems to have had a telling affect upon Xerxes. The very next words in the text come from the king, "Hang (suspend) him on it."

The chapter closes with a summary statement.

*So they hanged Haman on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king's fury subsided. Esther 7:10*

This statement is composed of two parts:

- The first deals with the hanging of Haman. The author, in this connection, repeated again the fact that these gallows were constructed by Haman to destroy Mordecai. This was a way to add emphasis to the irony of the entire situation.
- The second part deals with the effect of this hanging on the king. In our text it says, "Then the king's fury subsided." The Hebrew text is a bit more graphic. "The king's wrath (anger which poisons) lay down." The word "subsided" is "shakak" (שָׁכַךְ). It was used to describe the abating of a flood or to **lay** a trap. The meaning is not changed, but its presentation is far more graphic.

### Conclusion

Again, as we come to the end of a chapter, we want to restudy the material to see if we find any instance where we see God in action, even though His name is not mentioned.

1. It takes the help of God for Esther to dare to make her request and petition as she did.
2. Had Esther made her request and petition that first day in the throne room, the king would not have had all the information and concerns that he had at this second wine feast. It would have made a great difference in the outcome. This is not coincidental.
3. Esther's selfless identification of herself with her people struck a chord with Xerxes. He had unknowingly agreed to the destruction of these people and with them the wife he loved. Again, this was no coincidence.

## STANDING ALONE, BUT NEVER LONELY

4. It is not accidental that Esther used the three carefully disguised invitations to cultivate the growing interest and curiosity of the king.
5. It takes the encouragement of God for Esther to tell the king, in front of Haman, rather than behind his back, in private. God gave her the strength and encouragement.
6. It is not accidental that when Haman tried to plead with Esther for his life that it looked to Xerxes as though Haman was trying to take advantage of her. This made the king just that much more angry and determined to do away with Haman.
7. Is it not divine irony that Haman was hanged on the gallows he designed to get rid of God's servant Mordecai?
8. Justice was served. God quietly, but effectively brought evil men to pay the price of their evil ways and designs.

## QUESTIONS FOR ESTHER LESSON 8

### ESTHER 8:1 - 17

#### MORDECAI GIVEN HONOR AND POWER

1. There are four paragraphs in Esther chapter eight. On the following table, write a summary of seven words or less for each paragraph.

8:1, 2	
8:3-8	
8:9-14	
8:15-17	

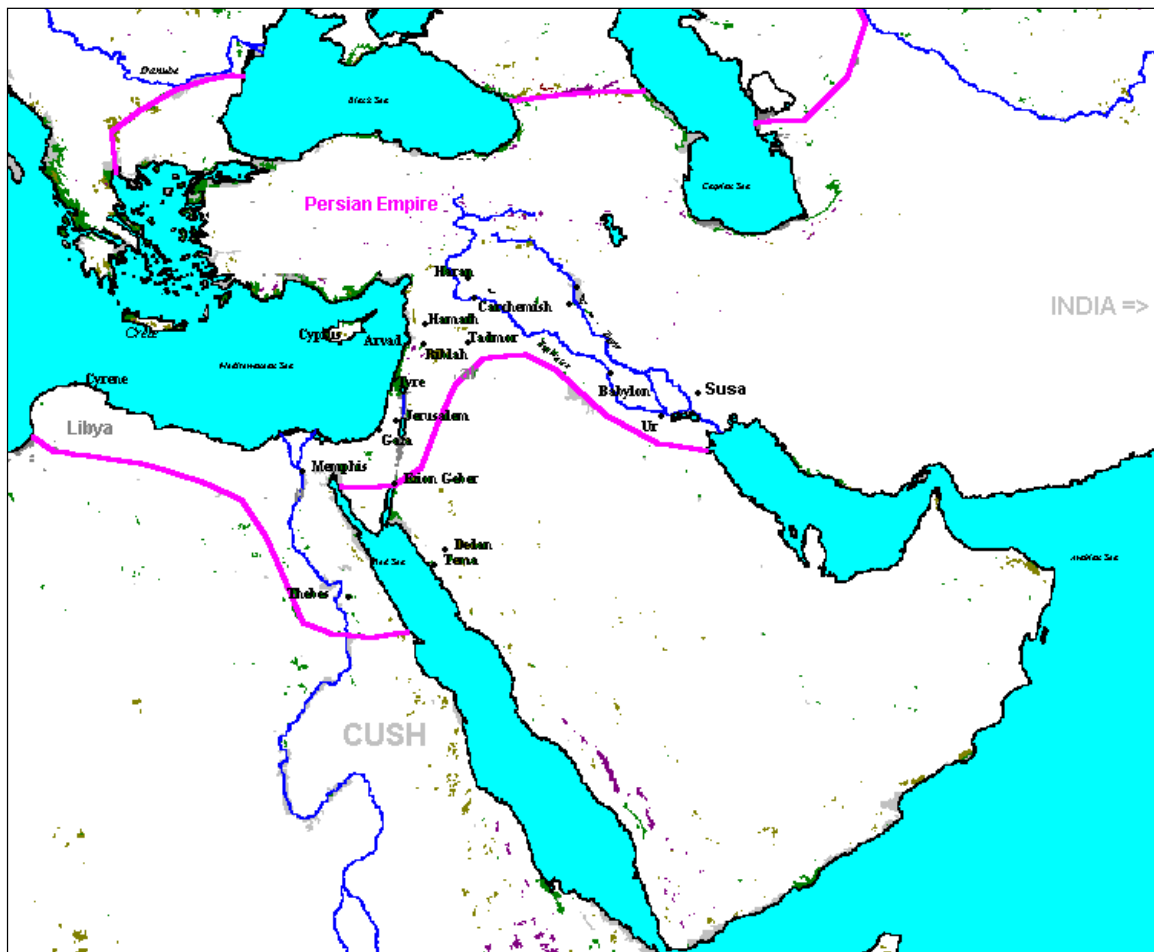
2. In Esther 8:1, 2, the author described Mordecai's elevation to the position of viceroy.
- In 8:1, the author made two reports.
    - What is the significance of giving Haman's property to Esther?
    - Why would the author include the report of Mordecai coming to the throne room?
  - In 8:2, Mordecai was honored.
    - What honors did he receive?
    - What does each honor mean?
    - Why would Esther receive the gift of Haman's estate and immediately turn it over to Mordecai's care?
3. In 8:3-8, Esther pleaded for Israel again.
- In 8:3, Esther made a very emotional plea before Xerxes on behalf of the Jews.
    - What did Esther beg Xerxes to do?
    - What problem can you sense with Esther's request?
    - In view of this problem, why would Esther make such a request?
  - In 8:4, the king responded to her petition.
    - What did he do?
    - What did this mean?
  - In 8:5, Esther prefaced her petition with four different conditions.
    - What were these conditions?
    - What petition did she make?
    - Put yourself in Xerxes' position as she made this petition. What would happen to you as she made the petition?
  - In 8:6, Esther concluded her petition with two questions.
    - What were the questions?
    - What did she mean by these questions?
    - What difference would these make to Xerxes as he considered her petition?
  - In 8:7, Xerxes responded to Esther's unusual petition.
    - What did he say?
    - What did this have to do with her petition?
    - What message was Xerxes giving to Esther and Mordecai?

## STANDING ALONE, BUT NEVER LONELY

- f. In 8:8, Xerxes continued his response to Esther and Mordecai.
  - (1). To whom is Xerxes speaking in this verse?
  - (2). What instructions did he give?
  - (3). What explanation did Xerxes give? Why?
  - (4). How would you evaluate Xerxes response to Esther and Mordecai?
- 4. In Esther 8:9-14, Mordecai wrote to the Jews throughout the empire.
  - a. In 8:9, the author described the preparations that were made for Mordecai to carry out the instructions of Xerxes.
    - (1). The author gave the date on which this was done. Why was this important?
    - (2). The author identified the areas to which this order was to be sent.
      - (a). Where was it sent?
      - (b). Why was this important?
    - (3). Why would the author identify the languages in which the order was to be written?
  - b. In 8:10, the author described how Mordecai carried out the king's order. Why was this important information?
  - c. In 8:11, the author described the content of the order Mordecai sent to the Jews.
    - (1). What did he write to them?
    - (2). What three things could the Jews do which had been forbidden them in the past?
    - (3). The edict gave the Jews permission to "destroy, kill and annihilate..."
      - (a). Why would Mordecai feel the necessity to use all three words?
      - (b). What does one of these words indicate that the other two do not?
      - (c). Think carefully about this edict. What were the implications of this letter?
  - d. In 8:12, the edict identified the date on which the Jews were empowered to defend themselves. Think carefully about the implications of this fact.
    - (1). Why would Mordecai choose this date?
    - (2). Why did he not choose a date much earlier?
    - (3). Why did he not choose a later date?
  - e. In 8:13, the author identified the way the edict was sent out. Look carefully at the verse.
    - (1). What does this verse add to our understanding.
    - (2). What are the implications of the way this was handled?
  - f. In 8:14, the author described the courier's carrying of the edict to the provinces.
    - (1). Chronologically, what is the relationship of the issue of the edict in Susa to the sending of the edict to the 127 provinces?
    - (2). What difference could this make?
- 5. In Esther 8:15-17, Mordecai was honored and the Jews began to celebrate.
  - a. In 8:15, the author described the way Mordecai was honored.
    - (1). Describe the way Mordecai was honored?
    - (2). What is the significance of the fact that he wore robes of certain colors?
    - (3). What is the significance of the large golden crown?
    - (4). The text describes Mordecai's royal robe along with a fine linen robe. What was the difference?
    - (5). What does all this mean?

## QUESTIONS FOR ESTHER LESSON 8

- (6). What does the color of Mordecai's robes have to do with the celebration in Susa?
- b. In 8:16, the author described the kind of celebration this was for the Jews.
- (1). Explain the words he used to describe this celebration?
- (2). What does this tell us?
- c. In 8:17, the author described the response of the Jews to the receipt of the edict from Mordecai.
- (1). What was there in the edict that would give rise to this kind of celebration?
- (2). How do you account for the celebration in view of the fact that they were going to have to fight for their lives?
- (3). In this verse, the author also gave us some surprising information.
- (a). What was this information?
- (b). How can you explain this situation?
6. As we come to the close of the chapter, review what you have learned. Again, record the ways you see God in action in the chapter though His name is not mentioned.



The Persian Empire from India to Cush



## LESSON 8: – ESTHER 8:1 – 17

### MORDECAI GIVEN HONOR AND POWER

#### Introduction

There are four paragraphs in Esther chapter eight. They are as follows:

8:1, 2	Mordecai Became Viceroy
8:3 - 8	Esther Pleaded Again For Her People
8:9 - 14	Mordecai Wrote to the Jews: “Defend Yourselves.”
8:15 - 17	Mordecai Honored; The Jews Celebrated

#### Esther 8:1, 2 - Mordecai Became Viceroy

Xerxes wasted no time in expressing his gratitude and concern for Esther and her people.

*That same day King Xerxes gave Queen Esther the estate of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. And Mordecai came into the presence of the king, for Esther had told how he was related to her. Esther 8:1*

He did not wait for an appropriate time. He apparently thought that too much time had already elapsed. On the same day that Xerxes had Haman hanged, he gave the entire house and household of Haman as a gift to Esther.

There is an irony in this event. Haman hated the Jews enough to wipe out the entire nation. The Jews fasted and prayed. Haman built a gallows on which to hang Mordecai. Haman, himself, was hanged on that gallows and his entire estate was given to Esther, the queen, as a present, and she was a Jew. There is almost a gentle sarcasm as the author identified Haman as “the enemy of the Jews.”

Notice how the author identified Haman, “the enemy of the Jews.” It adds insult to injury to think of Haman as the greatest enemy of the Jews being brought to justice by Jews and eventually destroyed because of his hate and deceit.

The author, also, indicated that Mordecai came before the king. Every detail of the text is important. One wonders what made it so important to say that Mordecai came before the king. Here are some possibilities:

- This could show the difference in Mordecai’s position. Until now, he had served in the king’s gate. This was an astonishing promotion for anyone. It was even greater in view of the fact that Mordecai was a Jew.
- We must remember that Xerxes had signed a law ordering the extermination of all Jews on a specified day. This may have been a symbolic way to say to everyone - Esther and Mordecai are to be exempted from this edict.

The text gives no hint of the king’s purposes, but these are worth noting.

The author explained the coming of Mordecai before Xerxes in these words, “for Esther had told how he was related to her.” This carried a special significance to them for two reasons:

Mordecai had distinguished himself on two occasions:

- a. He had warned the king when two of his guards were planning to kill him.
- b. He had accepted the honor of the king without fanfare or arrogance. This was a rare quality in the court, but always a welcome exception.

Whenever the king married, he had a very special relationship with the bride's family. It always meant that there must be friendship and cooperation between the two families. When Esther told the king of her relationship to Mordecai, it was required that he honor Mordecai in at least a symbolic way, if not in reality. Xerxes did both. He brought Mordecai into the throne room, a place he had probably only visited previously when he was given his position in the king's gate.

The king had a greater gift and honor in mind for Mordecai.

*The king took off his signet ring, which he had reclaimed from Haman, and presented it to Mordecai. And Esther appointed him over Haman's estate. Esther 8:2*

The ring was the symbol of the king's power. When someone placed that seal upon a document, it was exactly the same as the king signing it himself. This was a symbol of great power and honor. It was an even greater symbol of the king's trust of Mordecai.

The author specifically included a statement that this was the ring Xerxes had taken away from Haman when he was hanged. We have a similar ceremony in the military. When a soldier has disgraced himself and the armed services, he is publicly humiliated by having any medals he has earned, along with his signs of rank and the insignia of the service ripped from his uniform before he is officially placed before the firing squad. That is what happened to Haman at his hanging.

The author continued by reporting Esther's honoring of Mordecai. Notice what the author wrote:

*And Esther appointed him over Haman's estate.” Esther 8:2c*

We might wonder why Esther would make Mordecai the administrator of Haman's estate. You will remember that he was her cousin, but took her into his home like one of his own daughters. Even as the queen, Esther obeyed the instructions Mordecai gave her concerning her nationality. That being the case, she should give whatever she received into his care. My suspicion is that she would gladly have done that, had it been possible. It was not possible. Haman's estate was a gift from her husband the king. It would have been a disgrace for her to give it to anyone. That being impossible, she did what she could. She placed the entire property in his administrative care and control. Again, the author shows us insight into the character of Esther. She was now the queen, but she never forgot her people; she never forgot her cousin who took her into his home like his own daughter.

### **Esther 8:3-8 - Esther Pleads Again for Her People**

This scene, again, takes place in the throne room of the palace.



*Esther again pleaded with the king, falling at his feet and weeping. She begged him to put an end to the evil plan of Haman the Agagite, which he had devised against the Jews. Esther 8:3*

Though the text does not say so, it appears that a second time Esther approached the king with a request without invitation. Some might say that because of the way she exposed the activities of Haman, Xerxes had lifted the ban on uninvited approach. Thus Esther could come to him without fear. In view of what she had done, that would be a good idea, but there is nothing in the text to suggest this.

Esther was a very thorough person. She did almost everything in a carefully designed fashion. Look at the way she presented her petition the second time. It is described in four different images:

**She pleaded with the king** - The word “pleaded” is “dabar” (דָּבַר). It comes from the word “to arrange.” It was sometimes used to convey the idea of “to speak,” “to subdue,” and very often “to entreat.” The latter possibility was used in this instance.

**She fell at his feet** - This was an act of subservience. It was intended to show the recipient that the humbled one was dependent upon him. It, also, demonstrated the intensity of the need or desire. Esther fell down before Xerxes the same way Haman had fallen down before her pleading for his life.

**She wept** - The word translated “weeping” is much stronger than the English translation suggests. “Bakah” (בָּכָה) literally means “to weep,” but the idea “bemoaning” is truer to its use. The word was also used “to lament,” or “to mourn.” This is some very intensive emotional expression on her part.

**She begged him** - The word “begged” is “chanan” (חָנַן). This word was sometimes used to describe a prayer of intense petition. It is to plead for mercy. It described a plea for pity.

She left absolutely no doubt in the king’s mind that she was desperate for relief.

The object of her request was again restated: “Put an end to the evil plan of Haman the Agagite, which he had devised against the Jews.”

This presents an intense problem. Esther had done great service for the king, and he knew it. She had humbled herself before him and pleaded for help in the most intensive way possible. One would need a heart of iron to refuse her intense desires.

She presented the king with a thorny problem. He was in a bind. He wanted to give Esther what she requested. On the other hand, she was asking the impossible. She was asking the king to reverse a law that was written as “the law of the Medes and the Persians which does not change.” By the affixing of his seal, the law became irreversible. Certainly Esther would know this as everyone else in the realm would know. Once the seal of Xerxes was affixed to the document, no human being could change it.

It is clear that this account was written by a Jew. Notice how Esther described Haman, “The evil plan Haman the Agagite...” There is scorn and derision in this identification.

Did Esther put Xerxes in this most awkward position on purpose or was she so distraught that she didn't realize the full consequences of her request? We don't really know, but in view of past performance, one would surmise that she did exactly what she wanted to do.

The king was in an awkward position. The author now focuses our attention on his response.

*Then the king extended the gold scepter to Esther and she arose and stood before him. Esther 8:4*

The extending of the golden scepter was a symbolic act which invited Esther to approach the throne to make her request. Without this gesture, it was not permissible for anyone to approach the throne close enough to make a request. Having received the sign of welcome, Esther stood to make her request.

Notice the way Esther presented her request.

*"If it pleases the king," she said, "and if he regards me with favor and thinks it the right thing to do, and if he is pleased with me, let an order be written overruling the dispatches that Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, devised and wrote to destroy the Jews in all the king's provinces." Esther 8:5*

Observe that Esther prefaced her request with four separate conditions:

- **"If it pleases the king"** - The word "pleases" in Hebrew is "towb" (טוֹב) which is "to be." It is most commonly used to identify something that is good; something that will do or make good; something beautiful, pleasurable or well-favored. It carries both the idea of pleasing Xerxes as well as something he deems to have great value.
- **"If he regards me with favor"** - It literally says, "If I have acquired kindness; if I come forth with the kindness of the king." It is a way of saying let my reputation with the king determine whether my request is put into action or not. Now this was a risky way to put it. We must remember, however, that her earlier conduct stood her in good stead with the king.
- **"If he thinks it is the right thing to do"** - The word "right" is "kasher" (כָּשֶׁר) and literally means "to be straight." It was used to describe something or someone who was acceptable; one who was apt to succeed.
- **"If he is pleased with me"** - The word "pleased" is the same word Esther used previously when she said, "If it pleases the king." Esther staked her whole reputation and relationship with the king on whether or not he would meet this impossible request. What courage!

Only then did Esther dare to spell out her request in full detail. Notice what Esther suggested:

*"Let an order be written overruling the dispatches that Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, devised and wrote to destroy the Jews in all the king's provinces." Esther 8:5b*

Esther had lived in Persia for over a decade. Certainly, she knew of the laws of the “Medes and the Persians.” The question remains, being she knew this, why then would she make such an impossible request? Remember, she is grasping at straws.

Notice that she spoke of “the dispatches that Haman... devised and wrote...” It is possible that she thought that because Haman wrote this law, and not Xerxes, that it did not really qualify as “a law of the Medes and the Persians.” The truth of the matter is that so long as it bore the seal of the king, it was the law; it could not be overruled.

Esther described Haman’s dispatches as, “Devised... to destroy the Jews in all the king’s provinces.” It is, also, possible that she thought the dispatch could be disqualified because of its horrible intent. Intent had nothing to do with the law. If the king’s seal was on it, it could not be rescinded, even by the king.

Esther continued by giving her own reasons for the request.

*For how can I bear to see disaster fall on my people? How can I bear to see the destruction of my family?" Esther 8:6*

Esther preceded these questions with the word “for.” This suggested that a strong reason for the foregoing material was about to be presented. She asked two questions, one more personal than the other.

- **“How can I bear to see disaster fall on my people?”** - The implied answer to her rhetorical question was that she could not bear this at all. The word “disaster,” which Esther used, is “rah” (רָעָה) which means “to spoil,” “to turn bad.” It means “good for nothing,” “wicked.”
- **“How can I bear to see the destruction of my family?”** - Again, the implied answer to her rhetorical question is that she can’t bear to see this. The word “bear” is “yakowl” (יָכֹל) and means “to be able,” “to endure,” “to overcome extreme tragedy.” The word “destruction” is “obdan” (אֲבָדָן) and comes from the word which means “to wander.” Any person or animal that wandered in the desert was doomed to destruction. There was no doubt that this was her picturesque implication. Her family would be as doomed as a sheep that wandered off into the desert which surrounded the city of Susa.
- By identifying the people in the first question and her family in the second, she was describing the implications to her as well as to the king if this law was not overturned. She was certainly applying a great deal of pressure to Xerxes. This is especially true due to the fact that he was helpless to change the law.
- It was impossible to overturn the law. Her request would impel him to take some action. The thing she requested was impossible. The fact that Haman initiated the edict to kill the Jews made no difference at all. The action was taken in the name of the king and it could not be reversed or changed. Xerxes was on the spot. He had to, he wanted to do something.

*King Xerxes replied to Queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew, "Because Haman attacked the Jews, I have given his estate to Esther, and they have hanged him on the gallows." Esther 8:7*

## STANDING ALONE, BUT NEVER LONELY

When he responded, the king spoke to both Esther and to Mordecai. This is because Esther had made the emotional request and because Mordecai was now the viceroy and he needed to be aware of the fact that this was an unchangeable law.

He began by explaining the basis of his actions, now. Notice that the author identified Mordecai as “the Jew.” It is doubtful if a non-Jew would have the name “Mordecai.” The author’s use of “Mordecai the Jew,” stressed the idea that despite the fact that he was Jewish and under the edict of death, still the king honored him.

Xerxes said he hanged Haman and gave his estate to Esther because Haman attacked the Jews. It is a counter action:

Haman was going to hang Mordecai.	Xerxes hanged Haman on the same gallows erected to kill Mordecai.
Haman was going to plunder everything the Jews owned.	Xerxes gave Haman’s entire estate to Esther, a Jewess.

Xerxes decision and response did more than just counteract the intent of Haman. It went well beyond the vile ambitions of Haman.

Xerxes showed his determination to countermand the vile designs of Haman by two distinct actions:

1. He gave Haman’s estate to Esther. This was an emotion driven move. It would convince people that he did not support Haman’s plan, even though he had agreed to it.
2. He hanged Haman on the gallows this viceroy had erected to hang Mordecai.

Remember that Haman had written the edict as a “law of the Medes and the Persians.” As such, it could not be changed in any way, not even by the king himself.

*“Now write another decree in the king's name in behalf of the Jews as seems best to you, and seal it with the king's signet ring -- for no document written in the king's name and sealed with his ring can be revoked.” Esther 8:8*

The king had to be a clever politician in order to rule over the greatest kingdom in the world in that day. Here is evidence of his skill to deserve that throne. He wanted to respond to the plea of his wife and the plight of her people. He did not have the option to reverse the signed law, though that is what Esther pleaded for him to do. Nothing, however, prohibited him from writing another law, so long as it did not reverse the previous one. That is precisely what he did.

Xerxes worded his instructions to Mordecai with great care. It was made up of two parts:

1. “Write another decree in the king's name in behalf of the Jews as it seems best to you.” This was important for several reasons:
  - To allow a Jew to write the law would insure that if people were still skeptical about whether he was trying to help the Jews, it should deal with their doubts in good fashion.

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- This act made it clear that he had great trust in Mordecai.
- This law Mordecai was to write was to be “in behalf of the Jews.” Xerxes left no doubt that this was a good faith effort to deal with an obvious wrong that had been done in his name.

Xerxes gave no instructions concerning how to write the law. This successfully dealt with any reservations anyone might have concerning his sincerity in this issue. This law was to be unchangeable, written by a Jew on behalf of the Jews.

On the face of it, it appeared that Mordecai had final say about this law. Xerxes said, in effect, “write it and sign it.” Xerxes was trusting Mordecai implicitly. Whatever Mordecai wrote would be acceptable to Xerxes. Nothing was said about clearing the end product with the king. Reasonableness dictated that Mordecai should clear the law with the king because it would bear his name. At the least, the king was telling Mordecai that he had a wide range to write the law as it seemed in the best interests of the Jewish people. This suggests something in the character of the king that was above the average and most unusual in the courts of the day. This was not a political short term public relations scheme. It was to be signed with the king’s signet. This would mean that it would be the law of the land forever. What phenomenal confidence he had in his new viceroy! This is especially surprising since his previous viceroy had badly abused this privilege.

2. **“For no document written in the king’s name and sealed with his ring can be revoked.”** This statement makes it clear that his intent was to find a way to protect the Jews long term, not just on the day assigned for their extinction.

This has to tell us something serious about the character of the king. Certainly, he was a consummate politician, but he was also concerned and determined to do the right thing.

### **Esther 8:9-14 - Mordecai Wrote to Jews - Defend Yourself.**

Look at the way this verse is written:

*At once the royal secretaries were summoned -- on the twenty-third day of the third month, the month of Sivan. They wrote out all Mordecai's orders to the Jews, and to the satraps, governors and nobles of the 127 provinces stretching from India to Cush. These orders were written in the script of each province and the language of each people and also to the Jews in their own script and language. Esther 8:9*

We need to refresh our minds concerning the calendar they used at this time. As you know, they had two calendars - one sacred, one civil. In the book of Esther, references are identified by the sacred calendar and the assigned names of months are from the Babylonian calendar. We will use it also.

## STANDING ALONE, BUT NEVER LONELY

1	2	3	4	5	6
Nisan	Iyyar	Sivan	Tammuz	Ab	Elul
March-April	April-May	May - June	June-July	July-August	August-Sept.

7	8	9	10	11	12
Tishri	Marcheshvan	Chisel	Tebeth	Shebat	Adar
Sept.-Oct.	Oct. - Nov.	Nov. - Dec	Dec. - Jan.	Jan. - Feb.	Feb. - Mar.

The date assigned to exterminate the Jews was the thirteenth day of Adar, the twelfth month. This means that the plan was devised by Haman in the month of Adar, Previous. Verse nine indicated that this took place on the twenty-third day of Sivan or three months after the edict was written by Haman and nine months in advance of the scheduled massacre. This is well in advance of the planned tragedy, but just in time. You will remember that it takes several months to translate this message and carry it to the farthest provinces of the realm.

A sense of the urgency of the timing can be seen in the fact that, “At once the royal secretaries were summoned.” Mordecai knew that the time was short.

The next part of this long verse is written in general, summary form. There are several pieces of information. We will deal with them one at a time.

- **They wrote out all Mordecai’s orders to the Jews, and to the satraps, governors and nobles of the 127 provinces.** You will remember Haman’s orders were sent to the same people except that the Jews were omitted. Just writing these instructions would take weeks. There were large numbers of officials in all 127 provinces who needed the information. Every official in every area where there were Jews would have to receive the instructions. A copy would have to be sent to the Jews in every area where they were dispersed, in all 127 provinces. This alone would require thousands of copies. All together, thousands of letters had to be written in hundreds of different languages and dialects. What a monumental task!
- This describes the extremities of the kingdom as being from India to Cush. (see map on page **Error! Bookmark not defined.**) Travel would have to be by horse, so it would take months just to make the trip to each of the 127 provinces. It is certain that though there were several months before the previous law was to be implemented, time was crucial.
- As we indicated earlier, the Persians tried to communicate with the people of each conquered nation in their own language or dialect. Just to get the message translated in the dozens of languages and many more dialects was a gigantic task.

The author continued with a description of how Mordecai carried out the instructions of the king.

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*Mordecai wrote in the name of King Xerxes, sealed the dispatches with the king's signet ring, and sent them by mounted couriers, who rode fast horses especially bred for the king. Esther 8:10*

In a kingdom the size of Persia, there was too much work for the king to write his own laws. He committed this task to Mordecai as he had previously done with Haman. As keeper of the king's signet, Mordecai placed the signet ring upon some soft clay or wax on each letter. This could not have been more legal if Xerxes had written the law with his own hand.

Mordecai, then, sent these hundreds of letters to the Jews and governmental officials by a special corps of couriers who were the fastest riders in the realm. These couriers rode fast horses specially bred for speed and endurance. If you look at a topographical map of the kingdom, it is obvious that some of these riders had to cross mountain passes 12,000 feet high. Many others had to cross vast stretches of desert waste land to deliver these important messages.

The author, then, described the content of the law written by Mordecai on behalf of the king.

*The king's edict granted the Jews in every city the right to assemble and protect themselves; to destroy, kill and annihilate any armed force of any nationality or province that might attack them and their women and children; and to plunder the property of their enemies. Esther 8:11*

You will remember that in our discussion of Esther 8:8, we indicated that the king instructed Mordecai to write another law. This edict could not reverse the previous law, but should provide a way for the Jews to escape the annihilation Haman designed for them. Mordecai did it well.

As you study this verse, it is clear that Mordecai wrote this law carefully. It in no way countermands the law written by Haman. Mordecai gave evidence of the great confidence he had in the Jewish people.

There were three specific things Mordecai included in the law which would benefit the Jews:

1. **They were allowed to congregate on that day.** In this way they could defend themselves and each other.
2. **They were given the unusual permission to defend themselves against any armed force, even the army of the king.** Mordecai had confidence that the Jews could defend themselves against the imperial army though they were not trained soldiers. The edict said they could "kill and annihilate any armed force." This expresses great confidence in the Jews and sends a word of caution to military commanders in each territory.
3. **They could plunder the property of their enemies.** This provides a bit more than meets the eyes. Their potential enemies were of three kinds:
  - a. The army of the empire
  - b. The provincial militia

c. Their neighbors

The implications of this law were important.

- IF the king's army carried out the previous law, written by Haman, and IF the Jews defeated the king's army; THEN the law, written by Mordecai, gave the Jews the right to plunder local property of the king. This was amazing.
- The Jews were spread in all 127 provinces. IF the militia of a province attempted to carry out the law written by Haman and IF the Jewish people in that province gathered together and IF the Jews defeated the militia of the province in which they were enslaved; THEN the law Mordecai wrote gave these Jews the right to plunder all the property of the province whose militia they had defeated.
- Again, Haman's law allowed anyone in the empire to kill and plunder the Jews. IF the Jews defeated any citizen of the kingdom who tried to kill them, THEN Mordecai's law gave the Israelites authority to plunder all the property of the person who tried to kill any Jew.

Mordecai wrote an ingenious law at the command of the king. It did not rescind the law by Haman. That would be illegal. It was so written, however, that Haman's law would be made of none effect. If anyone attempted to carry out Haman's law, the Jews were provided with a great advantage and incentive. If anyone tried to carry out Haman's law and won, they would displease the king. If they lost, they would humiliate the king. Whatever happened, anyone who attempted to carry out Haman's law was making great problems for himself, win or lose. That is, obviously, exactly what Mordecai set out to accomplish.

Remember, a copy of this law was sent to the Jews along with all the provincial and military officials in every province of the empire. The fact that the Jews were sent a copy of the law, effectively removed the entire element of surprise. The fact that the law gave the Jews the right to gather and defend themselves and each other added a serious element of risk to any force that attempted to carry out Haman's law. The fact that the Jews were given the authority to plunder conquered attackers, but if the Jews were conquered, there were few if any possessions to be plundered, made Haman's law hardly worth the effort and risk. Mordecai had removed the threat of Haman's law, without touching the law itself.

Mordecai gave additional instructions.

*The day appointed for the Jews to do this in all the provinces of King Xerxes was the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar. Esther 8:12*

In Esther 3:13, Haman made the thirteenth day of the twelfth month the effective date of the slaughter. In this verse, Mordecai made the same day the effective date of his law. The law was published to each province and to the Jews immediately. This would give the Jews sufficient time to prepare for their defense. It also provided incentive for them to defend themselves from attack.

In the verse which followed, Mordecai explained the actions concerning his command.



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*A copy of the text of the edict was to be issued as law in every province and made known to the people of every nationality so that the Jews would be ready on that day to avenge themselves on their enemies. Esther 8:13*

This law was intended to protect Israel and allow them to prepare and defend them against the terrible slaughter instituted in the law Haman wrote. It accomplished this task very well.

Observe the way the author described this directive, “to be issued as a law...”

Because of the way Mordecai wrote this edict, the provincial leaders could not resist obeying his command. This “law of the Medes and the Persians,” could not be circumvented. Anyone attempting to do this would face the sentence of death.

The author clearly indicated that the purpose of this law and the way it was written was to prepare the Jewish people to avenge themselves. The word “avenge” is “naqam” (נָקַם) and literally means “grudge,” “to avenge,” “to punish,” “to take vengeance.” Mordecai was not just talking about staying alive. He spoke of inflicting punishment upon the people for what they had done to the people of Israel. Again, Mordecai spoke with great confidence in the ability of his people to not only survive the attacks of superior enemy forces, but also of their ability to defeat and punish enemy forces.

Having prepared the document, Mordecai immediately implemented it.

*The couriers, riding the royal horses, raced out, spurred on by the king's command. And the edict was also issued in the citadel of Susa. Esther 8:14*

The specially trained horses and riders left in haste to deliver the edict prepared by Mordecai.

If the chronology of the text is accurate, and I believe it is, then only after the riders were safely on their way was the law presented in Susa, the capital city. This was a significant move on Mordecai’s part. Most of the people in governmental positions would internally oppose Mordecai’s actions. Because of Mordecai’s position and because it was commanded by the king, they would not directly or verbally take a stand against the law. Political forces, as we know quite well, have dozens of ways to oppose an issue without confronting it head-on. Because the law had already been signed and sent, these were moot issues. Nothing could now be done.

### **Esther 8:15-17 - Mordecai Was Honored; The Jews Celebrated**

Again, as we begin this paragraph, the spotlight shifts back to Mordecai himself.

*Mordecai left the king's presence wearing royal garments of blue and white, a large crown of gold and a purple robe of fine linen. And the city of Susa held a joyous celebration. Esther 8:15*

There is another contrast here between Mordecai and Haman. When Haman thought that the king was going to honor him, he suggested that the king clothe the man he delighted to honor, Haman, in royal robes. That never happened. When Mordecai finished carrying out the command of the king, the text indicates that “He went out from the king in the apparel of the kingdom.” The text does not explain this expression, but it does describe the garments in these terms:

- **“Garments of blue and white”** - The word “blue,” in the Hebrew text, is “shecheleth” (שֶׁחֶלֶת). This is a shell or musel which has been pulverized, It takes 12,000 of these shells from Murer Brandaris, to make 1.4 grams of the basic dye. These shells were found only in a bay off the coast of Asia Minor in well over 100 feet of water. Individual divers had to risk their lives to dive to such great depths to secure these shells. The shells had to be pulverized to get this strong rich color for the dye.<sup>1</sup> Rulers from all parts of the Near East wore garments colored with this color-fast dye for many centuries. Such garments were most costly. Though it was not dictated by law, in most instances, only royalty and highest governmental officials wore garments dyed with this color. The word for “white,” is “chuwv,” (חֹוֹו) This word means “to bleach,” or “blanch.” We must not let our understanding of “white” color our thinking. The lightest this would be would be a light beige. It, too, was very expensive. The light color was achieved by moistening the material and allowing it to be bleached by the sun. Again, only the most wealthy and high officials could afford clothing made of this material.
- **“A large crown of gold”** - This must not be mistaken for kingly adornment. Only the king could wear this crown. It, like the blue/crimson, or white robe, was a symbol of his position of viceroy - second in command of the empire. Only the king wore symbols of greater honor than Mordecai.
- **“A purple robe of fine linen”** - This garment was quite thin and very cool in that hot climate. It was made of either cotton or linen fiber which had been bleached by the sun. To this very expensive material was added a purple dye. This is the same type of dye previously mentioned, but probably not made from the same mussel shells. It was a finer dye and, though less expensive, was used on finer materials. It was probably a vegetable dye and was not as permanent as the mussel dye. Nevertheless, only top governmental officials would be allowed to wear this uniform.

Each of these items of clothing would say to the people of the realm, this man is second only to the king in power and honor. Imagine it. Only weeks before, he was destined for annihilation. Now he was more powerful than anyone else save the king. To think that all of this happened without him ever attempting to climb the political ladder.

Included with this description of the finery in which the king honored Mordecai is a description of the reaction of the people of Susa. There is no report of how the people of the capital reacted to the elevation of Haman to the position of viceroy. Again, there was no report of their reaction to his being deposed and hanged. When Mordecai was given the same honor, however, the whole city celebrated and declared a holiday. Remember, the people rejoiced at this honor in spite of the fact that they knew he was a Jew.

The author continued his description of the celebration by focusing upon the reaction of the people of Susa.

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<sup>1</sup>David Noel Freedman, The Anchor Bible Dictionary, (New York City: Doubleday, 1992) Vol. 5, P. 557

*For the Jews it was a time of happiness and joy, gladness and honor. Esther 8:16*

The author used four different words to describe the reaction of the people.

- **Happiness** - The word; for “happiness” “owrah” (אוֹרָה) literally means “light,” “illumination,” “prosperity.” They celebrated as they would have had they gained great wealth.
- **Joy** - The word “joy” is “sumchah” (שִׂמְחָה) and means “to be gleeful,” “to make merry,” “to rejoice,” “to be very joyful.”
- **Gladness** - The word for “gladness” is “sasown” (שִׂשׂוֹן) and means “to be cheerful,” “to feel welcomed,” “to express great mirth,” “to rejoice,” “to be bright.”
- **Honor** - The word for “honor” is “yaqar” (יָקָר) and literally means “to be happy,” “to make valuable,” “to be prized,” “to make someone/something rare,” “valuable.”

The author used as many descriptive terms as he could to describe what this event meant to the people of the city in general and the Jews in particular.

In the closing verse of the chapter, the author turned his attention to the people of the 127 provinces.

*In every province and in every city, wherever the edict of the king went, there was joy and gladness among the Jews, with feasting and celebrating. And many people of other nationalities became Jews because fear of the Jews had seized them. Esther 8:17*

The author used four different phrases to describe the response in the 127 provinces:

1. **“joy and gladness among the Jews”** - Joy here, as in verse 15 is “simchah” and means “to be gleeful,” “to make merry,” “to rejoice.”  
The word “gladness” is “sasown” (שִׂשׂוֹן) as in verse 15. It is, again, an expression of great gladness, warmth, to be bright.
2. **“There was feasting and celebration”** - The word for “feasting” is “Mishteh” (מִשְׁתֶּה) and means “to imbibe,” “to drink.” It was a time of lavish festivities and drinking.  
The word for “celebration” is really “yome” (יוֹם) and means “to be hot,” “a space of time from one sundown to the next set apart to express one’s exhilaration and great rejoicing.
3. **People of other nationalities became Jews** - This is very important. The previous description focused on the party and drinking. This is a much more serious note. Becoming a Jew was not so much a political choice as it was a worship decision. Becoming Jewish expressed a favorable attitude toward the worship of Jehovah. The events involving the Jews convinced them that their God was greater than the gods of Persia and the other nations.
4. **“fear of the Jews had seized them”** - The word “fear” is “pachad” (פָּחַד) and literally means “to be startled,” “to be filled with sudden alarm,” “to tremble with fear and dread.”

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This is interesting for a couple of reasons:

1. The Jews had, until recently, been on the verge of total extinction. They had no power to exist much less threaten anyone. Suddenly they were a force with which to reckon. The shock of this startled everyone. How does one deal with a people who have nothing to lose and you have everything to lose?
2. The Jews were a small group of people at best. Add to this the fact that their power was diminished even more by being spread through each of the 127 provinces. They were hardly a force to fear. Recent events caused the other peoples, however, to realize just how powerful these previously powerless people had become. Now everyone feared their newly acquired power and prestige as exemplified in Mordecai.

### Conclusion

Again, we want to ask ourselves where it appears we see the action of God, even though He is not mentioned in the book.

1. Only God could have brought Mordecai to be viceroy when the current viceroy despised him so completely.
2. Esther, a Jewess, not only became queen, but she also became the recipient of all the wealth of Haman, the arch-enemy of the Jews.
3. Xerxes did not get angry with Esther even though she carried on emotionally, begging the king to do the impossible. That is shocking.
4. Only by the direction of God could Haman end up on the gallows he erected to hang Mordecai.
5. God worked so that a Jewess could become queen and Mordecai could become viceroy in a country where Jews were so mistrusted that they were spread out throughout 127 provinces to prevent them from causing trouble.

## QUESTIONS FOR ESTHER LESSON 9

ESTHER 9:1 - 32

### HAMAN'S SONS HANGED ON HIS GALLOWS

1. There are six paragraphs in Esther chapter nine. On the following table, write a summary of seven words or less for each paragraph

9:1-10	
9:11-16	
9:17-19	
9:20-25	
9:26-28	
9:29-32	

2. In Esther 9:1-10, the author described the Jews destruction of their enemies.
- In 9:1, the author described a shocking event.
    - What was that event?
    - What is the significance of the specific date this happened?
    - Put yourself in the place of Haman's friends. How would you feel?
  - In 9:2, there is a description of the Jews' response to this situation.
    - How did they respond?
    - Compare 9:2 with the king's edict, as listed in 8:11. What did you find?
    - How can you account for this?
    - If you were Xerxes, what would you do in light of this situation?
  - In 9:3, in view of the first royal edict that commanded the provincial leaders to kill the Jews, how do you account for their actions described here?
  - In 9:4, the author described the reputation of Mordecai.
    - What was that reputation? Why?
    - How does one become more powerful when he is already second in command of the kingdom?
  - In 9:5, there is a report of the Jews' experience in self-defense.
    - What did the author say?
    - What does this mean?
    - Explain each phrase of this verse in your own words.
  - In 9:6, the author reported the results in Susa.
    - Why did he list the results in Susa separately?
    - What does this tell us?
    - If you were Xerxes and received this report, what would you think?
    - What would you do?
  - In 9:7-10, the author identified the ten sons of Haman that were killed. What reason can you find for listing their names here?

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- h. In 9:10, the author carefully reported that though the Jews killed their enemies, they did not plunder anything of their property. Why was this important?
- 3. In Esther 9:11-16, Esther made an unusual request.
  - a. In 9:11, The author indicated that the report of the number killed in the palace, or "citadel" was given to Xerxes immediately. What was the importance of this action?
  - b. In 9:12, Xerxes told Esther of the number of people who were killed in the palace. Put yourself in Xerxes' place. What would you feel? How would you deal with this situation?
  - c. In 9:13, Esther made a very unusual request.
    - (1). Why would this be necessary?
    - (2). What good would this do?
    - (3). Again, put yourself in Xerxes position and record how you would respond to Esther's request concerning the sons of Haman.
    - (4). What problem do you see with this request?
  - d. In 9:14, the king responded to Esther's request.
    - (1). What was his response?
    - (2). What benefit did this have?
    - (3). How would the officials of the government respond to Xerxes' action?
  - e. In 9:15, the Jews took action against their enemies again.
    - (1). What did they do?
    - (2). Why would this be necessary?
    - (3). What would be the lasting value of this action?
  - f. In 9:16, the author reported how the Jews throughout the empire responded to Mordecai's edict.
    - (1). What happened?
    - (2). How would this affect the Medo-Persian people?
    - (3). What is the startling event in this report?
    - (4). The author again reported that the Jews took no plunder. What difference would this make?
- 4. In Esther 9:17-19, the Jews declared a feast and a celebration.
  - a. In 9:17, the author gave a summary of two different situations.
    - (1). What are the two situations?
    - (2). How do they relate to each other?
  - b. In 9:18, 19, the author gives an explanation.
    - (1). How did the author explain this situation?
    - (2). What does this tell you?
    - (3). The text speaks specifically of the giving of presents. How is this related to the situations with which they were dealing?
- 5. In Esther 9:20-25, Mordecai issued a command.
  - a. In 9:20, 21, what was the nature of Mordecai's command?
    - (1). What are the implications of Mordecai issuing this kind of command?
    - (2). What are the side-effects of Mordecai's command?
    - (3). Why was it important for the people to make this a perpetual celebration rather than a one time act?

## QUESTIONS FOR ESTHER LESSON 9

- b. In 9:22, the author described the celebration in more careful detail.
    - (1). Why would it be important to give presents of food to each other?
    - (2). What does giving gifts to the poor have to do with this celebration?
    - (3). In what way was their sorrow turned into joy?
  - c. In 9:23, the Jewish people responded to the command of Mordecai.
    - (1). What does this tell you about Mordecai?
    - (2). What does this tell you about the Jewish people?
    - (3). On what basis would the Jewish people obey Mordecai, a civil leader, on a matter which was spiritual in nature?
  - d. In 9:24, the author identifies Haman as he had several times previously.
    - (1). Why did the author identify Haman in this fashion again?
    - (2). What does Haman have to do with the establishment of this religious holiday?
    - (3). Why did they talk about the casting of the "Pur"?
  - e. In 9:25, the author portrays Xerxes as being fully supportive of the retaliation against Haman. Why would Xerxes want Haman's sons to be hanged also?
6. In Esther 9:26-28, the author gave an explanation of Purim.
- a. In 9:26, the author explained why the name Purim was used. What was the relationship between the name "pur" and the struggle which was highlighted in this book?
  - b. In 9:27, the people took it upon themselves to celebrate this feast regularly.
    - (1). Why was the date important?
    - (2). Why were the details so important to this observance?
    - (3). What was it that made this observance mandatory?
  - c. In 9:28, great care was taken to carry on this celebration without interruption.
    - (1). Why would this be so important?
    - (2). What does this tell us about Mordecai?
7. In Esther 9:29-32, there is a very unusual event recorded.
- a. In 9:29, Esther and Mordecai wrote a letter.
    - (1). Why would Esther be involved in the writing?
    - (2). What was the purpose of this letter?
  - b. In 9:30, 31, there is a description of the content of the letter.
    - (1). Why was this letter necessary?
    - (2). What did the letter accomplish?
  - c. In 9:32, Esther issued a decree.
    - (1). Where did Esther get the power to make a decree?
    - (2). What was the content of her decree?
    - (3). Why would it be important for Esther to make this decree, rather than Xerxes?
8. Review chapter nine again. List the places and events where you see the hand of God at work, though His name is never mentioned.





**LESSON 9: – ESTHER 9:1 – 32**  
**HAMAN’S SONS HANGED ON HIS GALLOWS**

**Introduction**

In Esther chapter nine, there are six paragraphs. These are summarized on the following table:

9:1-10	The Jews Destroy Their Enemies
9:11-16	Esther Requested Haman’s Sons be Hanged
9:17-19	The Jews Declare Feast and Celebration
9:20-25	Mordecai Commanded Purim to be Celebrated
9:26-28	An Explanation of Purim
9:29-32	Esther Wrote Purim Letter to Jews

Observe that there are six paragraphs in this chapter. Compare that information with the previous chapters.

CHAPTER	NUMBER OF PARAGRAPHS
1	3
2	6
3	3
4	4
5	3
6	2
7	1
8	4
9	6

With the exception of chapters two and nine, as highlighted, there is an average of three paragraphs per chapter, up to this point. Look at a comparison of the content of these two chapters:

## STANDING ALONE, BUT NEVER LONELY

CHAPTER 2		CHAPTER 9	
2:1-4	A Plan to Replace Vashti	9:1-10	Jews Kill Their Enemies
2:5-7	Mordecai Took Esther as a Daughter	9:11-16	Haman's Sons were Hanged
2:8-11	Esther Taken to the House of Women	9:17-19	Jews Declared Feast and Celebration
2:12-15	Esther Prepared to Meet the King	9:20-25	Mordecai Com-manded Purim be Celebrated
2:16-18	Esther Became Queen	9:26-28	Explanation of Purim
2:19-23	Mordecai Foils Plot Against Xerxes	9:29-32	Esther and Mordecai write Purim Letter to Jews

Observe that in both chapters there is movement from tragic turmoil to rejoicing. These chapters are emotional roller coasters. It is not surprising that there are twice the average number of paragraphs in these chapters.

### Esther 9:1-10 - The Jews Destroyed Their Enemies

There is a strange irony reported as we begin this chapter. Notice how the author reported it.

*On the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, the edict commanded by the king was to be carried out. On this day the enemies of the Jews had hoped to overpower them, but now the tables were turned and the Jews got the upper hand over those who hated them. Esther 9:1*

The date established by Haman was about to arrive. On the thirteenth. day of Adar, which is the twelfth month in their calendar and February-March in ours, Haman's decree was to be carried out. The text does not say, directly, but it appears that Mordecai's edict did not deter the enemies of the Jews in any way. According to the text, they were prepared to annihilate all the Jews and plunder their property. It is clear that the people despised the Jews as much as the officials feared trying to control them.

The text says that the enemies of the Jews "hoped to overpower them." The word "hoped" is "sawbar" (שָׁבַר) and means "to watch carefully with expectation." This is a bit like a cat watching a fish bowl. The enemies of the Jews, in spite of Mordecai's edict, were eagerly waiting for this date, confident that the Jews would still be annihilated and their belongings available for plunder.

Notice that the word "but" appears in this sentence. This word almost always indicates a strong contrast. In this instance it identifies the following contrast:

The enemies hoped to overpower the Jews.	<b>BUT</b>	The tables were turned and the Jews got the upper hand over those who hated them
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## HAMAN'S SONS HANGED ON HIS GALLOWS

The Hebrew text is slightly different, instead of, "Now the tables were turned," it says, "It was overthrown, so that..." The word "overthrown" is "haphak" ( הָפַךְ ) and means "to turn over," "to change seriously." This is significant because it gives us two pieces of information:

1. There is a reversal of expectations on the part of Israel's enemies. The way it is written indicates some measure of the shock this represented for them.
2. It tells us something about how God acts. He repeatedly overturns the powerful plans of His enemies, not by sheer force, but rather by a slight change in circumstances.

The author, then, reported a surprising turn of events. This was totally out of character.

*The Jews assembled in their cities in all the provinces of King Xerxes to attack those seeking their destruction. No one could stand against them, because the people of all the other nationalities were afraid of them. Esther 9:2*

You may remember Mordecai's edict, as recorded in Esther 8:11.

*The king's edict granted the Jews in every city the right to assemble and protect themselves; to destroy, kill and annihilate any armed force of any nationality or province that might attack them and their women and children; and to plunder the property of their enemies. Esther 8:11*

The Jewish people in the 127 provinces gathered as they were permitted to do in Mordecai's decree. They went beyond the edict once they had gathered together. Mordecai authorized them to defend themselves and protect their families. The Hebrew text of 9:2 is slightly different from ours, but the meaning is essentially the same. It reads, "the Jews assembled in their cities in the provinces of king Ahazuerus to stretch out a hand against those seeking their affliction." This is a way of saying that they attacked their enemies. In defense of these Jewish people, one might say that they defended themselves by killing everyone who had previously proven to be their enemies.

If you think about this, they had two kinds of enemies:

1. **The local authorities in every city.** - These Jewish men were excellent workers, but did poorly at being slaves. They never adjusted to being slaves. Officials were always afraid that Jewish slaves would escape or revolt. This would jeopardize the local officials before their superiors. This tenuous relationship would create severe tensions.
2. **The local people in the area** - The Medo-Persian people were idolaters, like most of their neighbors. The primary motivation of their worship and service was fear. Other conquered peoples were also idolaters and would not be averse to worship of the local gods. The Jews would worship only Jehovah. The local people would be afraid their gods would be angry if only part of the population of the country took part in their idolatrous sacrifices, feasts and orgies. Thus, there were constant tensions between the local people and the Jewish slaves.

Add to this the fact that Jewish people had different customs and practices than the rest of the population. They would not eat pork, which many idolatrous groups

used in their sacrifices and feasts. They would refuse to care for the sacrificial animals. They rested on their Sabbath, while their neighbors would rest on the previous day. The Jews were a disruptive force in every community.

Because the Jews were slaves, the local people were not reluctant to vent their wrath upon these uncooperative slaves. It was upon these people that the Jewish people vented their defensive wrath on the appointed day.

There is another surprise in this verse. The text does not tell us whether the Jews outnumbered their enemies or not. Though the text is silent on this issue, it appears reasonable to believe that between the native Medo-Persian people of the province and city and the slaves from other nations would usually outnumber the Jews by a substantial margin.

The author does not tell us that no one - native or foreigner - could stand against the Jews. It had nothing to do with numbers. It was rather because the people of every nationality were afraid of the Jews. The word used for “afraid” in this verse was “pachad” (פָּחַד) which meant “a sudden startling dread,” “a trembling caused by shock.” These people knew before the confrontation started that they were no match for these Jewish slaves. Because of this, it is not surprising that they could not stand against the Jews.

The author, then, added another ingredient to the situation.

*And all the nobles of the provinces, the satraps, the governors and the king's administrators helped the Jews, because fear of Mordecai had seized them. Esther 9:3*

He spoke of four different levels of government officials:

1. **Rulers of the provinces** - These rulers, or “tsar,” were the ones in command of the entire province. In many instances, this would be a high ranking military officer who had distinguished himself in battle. He was rewarded by being placed in this honored position. This is comparable to a state governor in the American political system.
2. **The Lieutenants** - These officials were often called by the Persian title, “satraps.” These were one step below the level of the “rulers” or “commanders.” They could be on the provincial level what Mordecai was in the empire.
3. **The deputies** - This is not a Persian title. It probably represents a layer of government much like our county system. In some instances, these men were also military men of lesser rank than the rulers or satraps.
4. **Officers of the king** - These men carried out the wishes of the provincial leaders and other officials. It is entirely possible that some of them were people who had become prisoners of war, but held great potential as leaders of government.

These officials were quite familiar with Mordecai’s sudden rise to power, fame and exalted position. In view of what had happened to Haman, they knew it was personal and political suicide to oppose him.

The fear of these men translated into helping the Jews who had previously been so ill-treated. This verse should not be thought to mean that this is the reason for the startling

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success experienced by the Jews. This fact contributed to their success, but was not solely responsible for it.

Think for a moment about the spot in which these leaders found themselves. Haman had issued an edict, in the king's name, that the Jews were all to be killed. That law could not be reversed or changed. It must be carried out. On the other hand, these leaders were also in possession of another law issued by Mordecai. Now, the second most powerful person in the land, Mordecai made it clear that these Jews were to have the opportunity to defend themselves. In doing this, the intent of the first edict would be successfully countermanded though not literally changed. Every one of these officials knew that he could be put to death for not fulfilling both of these commands. It would be impossible, of course, to do this.

The author then explained the situation sustained by Mordecai.

*Mordecai was prominent in the palace; his reputation spread throughout the provinces, and he became more and more powerful. Esther 9:4*

On this basis, it is easy to understand why officials would be in a difficult spot trying to determine the course of action concerning these two irreversible edicts.

The author used three descriptive phrases to identify Mordecai's rise to power:

1. **"Mordecai was prominent in the palace"** - The word "prominent" is "gawdole" (גָּדֹלָה). It comes from the root word which means "to twist." A twisted rope is much stronger than the same number of strands untwisted. It means "to be large," "to be honored," "to advance." In the palace, no one increased in power and honor as Mordecai did.
2. **"His reputation spread throughout the provinces"** - The word "reputation" is "shoma" (שֹׁמָע) and means "to hear," "to publish," "to discern," "to give witness." Everyone had heard about Mordecai. By now, the news of his encounter with Haman must have spread throughout the empire. The fact that he was Jewish could not have escaped the attention of government leaders throughout the realm. The way he had moved from the king's gate to be the viceroy was common knowledge by now. It must have seemed like every day they heard of some new honor or responsibility given to Mordecai.  
Incidentally, the text says that his reputation "spread." The word is "halak" (הָלַךְ) and literally means "to walk," "to march," "to gossip," "to send speedily." Like the wave of an ocean, Mordecai's reputation spread over the land.
3. **"He became more and more powerful"** - The Hebrew text is a bit different. It reads, "Mordecai was growing "becoming great," "walking" - "halak" (הָלַךְ) and was "being honored", "strong," "gawdole" (גָּדֹלָה). This had to be an awesome thing for the leaders of Medo-Persia to watch, especially since Mordecai was a Jew.

The scene immediately shifts to the month of Adar, when Haman's command was required to be carried out.

*The Jews struck down all their enemies with the sword, killing and destroying them, and they did what they pleased to those who hated them. Esther 9:5*

This verse is quite graphic. It had to be a great shock to the enemies of the Jews. We might have expected the text to say that the Jews attempted to defend themselves against their enemies. On the contrary, the author used four phrases to describe what the Jews did to their enemies:

1. **"The Jews struck down all their enemies"** - The word for "struck down" is "nakah" (נָכַח) and means "to strike," "to wound severely," "to slaughter." The author emphasized that the "Jews struck down **all** their enemies." The inference is that there were a lot of enemies. He, also, inferred that not one of them escaped - they all died. The author further states that the Jews did this with the sword. We must remember that these Jews were slaves. We are forced to wonder how and where these Jews got such weapons. As slaves, they had no money. We wonder if under the support of Xerxes the military provided the Jews the means to defend themselves.
- If you go back to Haman's edict, in 3:13, no group is given specific responsibility to carry out this slaughter. There is a general instruction to destroy the Jews. The letter was addressed to governmental officials, but no one was singled out for responsibility.
2. **They killed them** - The word translated "killed" is "hereg" (הָרַג) and means "to slaughter," "to murder," "to put to death." It is a brutal way to die.
3. **They destroyed them** - the word translated "destroyed" is "abdan" (אָבַד) and means literally "to wander away," "to be given no opportunity to flee," "certain death." This is a desert area. To wander away in the desert is to perish in a most terrible way.
4. **They did what they pleased to those who hated them** - The word "sawney" (סָנְא) is translated "those who hate them." The word literally means "to be utterly odious," "to view as a foe." Again, the word "rawtsah" (רָצַח) is translated "what they pleased." It means "to be pleased," "to satisfy," "to take delight." It describes a situation in which the Jews did not just take the life of the enemy. They did it in such a way that it provided a high level of satisfaction. These Jewish people went way beyond defending themselves.

The author then became much more specific with his description:

*In the citadel of Susa, the Jews killed and destroyed five hundred men. Esther 9:6*

There is an interesting situation in the book of Esther that could easily escape our observation. The name "Susa" or "Shushan" is used in two different ways in the book. There is one verse in the book where this is very obvious.

*Spurred on by the king's command, the couriers went out, and the edict was issued in the citadel of Susa. The king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Susa was bewildered. Esther 3:15*

Observe that in this one verse, the author has used the term in both ways. We need to look throughout the book to see how the author has handled this situation. Notice the differences on the following table.

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SHUSHAN THE CITADEL (PALACE)		SHUSHAN	
1:2	3:15	3:15	9:14
1:5	8:14	4:8	9:15
2:3	9:6	4:16	9:15
2:5	9:11	8:15	9:18
2:8	9:12	9:13	

Both Nehemiah 1:1 and Daniel 8:2 allude to “Shushan the palace.” This suggests that these two designations were widely known and used.

When the author used the phrase “Shushan the palace” he referred to the entire palace complex. It was a huge complex that included hundreds if not thousands of people. Like many other palace complexes, it had a personality, character and identity all its own, apart from the place where it was located.

The author used the term “Shushan” to identify the capital city in which the palace complex was located. This metropolis had a character and life all its own; totally separate from the palace. These are specific, important designations we must observe if we are to fully understand what the author tried to say to us.

Observe that the author said that the Jews “killed and destroyed five hundred men.” This, again, is a graphic statement. The word translated “killed” is “harag” (הָרַג) and means “to smite with deadly intent,” to kill,” “to slaughter.” This is brutality of the most vicious kind.

The word translated “destroyed” is “awbad” (אַבַּד) which means “to wander away to certain, excruciating death.” These are the same two words the author used in 8:11 when he reported the edict that Mordecai sent to the Jews as well as the government leaders detailing the rights the king granted to the Jews to defend themselves and destroy their enemies. Imagine it! The Jews killed 500 enemies just in the palace. The outrage against the Jews had to be tremendous. On the other hand, the Jews must have fought valiantly to kill so many.

The author continued his detailing of the results of this cataclysmic day.

*They also killed Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai and Vaizatha, the ten sons of Haman son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews. But they did not lay their hands on the plunder. Esther 9:7-10*

The author listed the names of the ten sons of Haman who were killed, apparently over and above the 500 enemies killed in the palace. The text does not say so, but the listing of the names of the ten sons appears to be a way to emphasize the fact that the Jews did in fact kill Haman’s ten sons.

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The following table lists the names of the 10 sons of Haman and the origin of each of their names.

NAMES OF HAMAN'S SONS	ORIGIN OF SON'S NAMES
Parshandatha	Persian
<b>Dalphon</b>	
<b>Aspatha</b>	<b>Hebrew</b>
Poratha	Persian
Adalia	Persian
<b>Aridatha</b>	<b>Hebrew</b>
Parmashta	Persian (the first)
<b>Arisai</b>	<b>Hebrew</b>
<b>Aridai</b>	<b>Hebrew</b>
Vaizatha	Persian

You will observe that half of the sons, five of the ten, have names that came from Jewish roots, not Persian or Amalekite sources. The author of the book makes no mention of the Jewish roots of these names, much less giving an explanation for this fact. We can identify a couple of options:

1. It is possible that Haman had Jewish slave(s) by whom he had children. This is a strong possibility since he hated the Jews so intensely.
2. Near Eastern languages were sibling languages. They have many common roots. It would not be surprising to find a respected Persian name that had Hebrew roots. There are some Hebrew words that have Persian roots.

We have no answer for this issue. It is strange, however, that an anti-Semite, like Haman, would have five children with names that have Jewish roots.

Observe that the closing sentence in verse ten begins with the word “but.” This suggests that there is a strong contrast present. The content of the sentence points back to the Edict of Haman. In 3:13, Haman issued this edict:

*Dispatches were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces with the order to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews -- young and old, women and little children -- on a single day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods. Esther 3:13*

When Haman wrote the decree authorizing the extermination of the Jews, he also gave the authority to plunder all their property. The author's strong presentation of the fact that the Jews killed 510 men, but did not plunder their property was quite intentional. The author was showing the difference between the Jews and other citizens of the realm; the difference between Jewish motives and that of other citizens. The author stressed the fact that the



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Jewish defenders “did not lay their hands on the plunder.” It is an emphatic way of presenting these facts. It is also a sharp contrast between the actions of the Jews and the anticipated actions of their enemies. For the enemies of the Jews, the possibility of plunder was a main source of motivation. The Jews did not touch the belongings of their enemies.

### **Esther 9:11-16 - Esther Requested Haman's Sons be Hanged**

On that day, the trauma, devastation and turmoil had to be beyond description.

*The number of those slain in the citadel of Susa was reported to the king that same day. Esther 9:11*

The author does not explain why it was so important to have people report this information to the king. There are several possible reasons for this immediacy and concern:

1. **This happened in the palace** - Everything that happened in the palace was important to the king. So long as this was an empire where the passage of power was by force, every detail was important to his livelihood.
2. **These were palace people** - Most certainly, some of the dead had been government officials. Proper burial would need to be arranged immediately. The mourning period for them would be long. It would, also, be necessary to appoint new officials to take the place of the deceased. Because the only way to get people out of power was to take it away from them by force or death, or both, such times of distress were watched carefully. These were the times when subversives loved to make their move.

The fact that both the Queen and the Viceroy were involved in this legal uprising, made it even more important for the king to be watchful.

Xerxes' response to this report was one of mixed feelings.

*The king said to Queen Esther, "The Jews have killed and destroyed five hundred men and the ten sons of Haman in the citadel of Susa. What have they done in the rest of the king's provinces? Now what is your petition? It will be given you. What is your request? It will also be granted." Esther 9:12*

1. **There was shock in his response** - Xerxes' response came in the form of an “if...then...” conditional statement. The king was shocked that the Jews had killed 510 men in the palace. One can almost hear the wheels of his mind turning, as he thought, "if the Jews had to kill 510 men in the palace, where I am present, think how astronomical the number of the dead must be in the outer provinces of the country." It would have been a startling thought. The king's losses in this event could have been nearly as great as if all the Jews had been killed.
2. **There was a faithful depth of concern** - In spite of the devastating carnage that had already taken place, Xerxes wanted to know if there was still some part of Esther's petition and request that had not been met. Again, he dealt with the situation as had done previously - he promised it would be met without knowing the nature of her request. Notice that there is no mention of the limitation, "up to half of my kingdom," as he had said on previous occasions. This gives us a surprising view of how deep the relationship was between Xerxes and Esther.

This describes, again, the relationship between the king and queen. Her last request cost him many of his servants and officials. Still, without knowing what her request might be, he checked to see if she had other requests and promised their fulfillment without knowing what they were. A lesser man would not have been so generous.

The queen, true to her way of approaching the king, responded with courtesy and concern for the king's pleasure.

*"If it pleases the king," Esther answered, "give the Jews in Susa permission to carry out this day's edict tomorrow also, and let Haman's ten sons be hanged on gallows." Esther 9:13*

The wording of her statement assumes that if her request did not please the king, she was prepared to see the request rejected rather than cause him displeasure even though the rejection would be costly to her and to her people. If this was her attitude, it represents a selfless approach to life.

She said, "Give the Jews in Susa permission to carry out this day's edict tomorrow also..." Observe that Esther drew the distinction we mentioned earlier between Susa the city and Susa the palace. In this instance, she requested an extension of Mordecai's edict for one more day in the city of Susa. If we take Esther's request seriously, then it would seem that Jews had authority to defend themselves on the thirteenth, but without the king's approval for an extension, the authority would be withdrawn on the fourteenth. Again, if the Jews felt threatened on the fourteenth, as much as on the thirteenth, then it seems reasonable that the enemies of the Jews had continuing authority to kill and plunder the Jews, but the Jews had only the one day to defend themselves. It appears absurd, but it seems clear that is precisely what the Jews feared would happen.

How does one account for this? There may be several ways, but some stand out at this point:

1. The edict of Haman gave permission to kill the Jews on the thirteenth of Adar, but it was written in such a way that it should be understood that this was the day when it could begin, there is no suggestion of there being a termination to open season on the Jews.
2. It is possible that the Jews in the city were slaves of the Amalekites who also lived there. Aside from the edict of Haman, slave owners had total control over their slaves. Without the protection of the king, and following the death of 510 people killed by the Jews at the palace, there would be no hope that the Jewish people of the city could survive that day or any other day.

There may be many other explanations, but both of these seem to be in play at this point in the story.

There is an apparent problem in this verse. Esther made two requests:

1. Continue the edict covering the thirteenth to the fourteenth of Adar as well.
2. Hang Haman's ten sons on gallows.

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The apparent problem is that in 9:7-10, the author recorded the death of Haman's ten sons apparently slain by the sword. Now Esther wants them to hang these dead men. How does one kill ten dead men?

The answer is, you don't. In fifth century BC Persia, in the time of David and even in first century AD Jerusalem hanging was intended to achieve two purposes:

1. It was to punish the guilty for severe crimes.
2. It was, also, to be a vivid, shocking message to society and especially to potential lawbreakers that severe consequences attend the disobedience of authorities.

In Joshua 10:26, he and his forces had five kings trapped in a cave. Joshua brought them out, killed them and hung them on five trees for the rest of the day.

Esther knew the venom with which the enemies of the Jews attacked them. She knew that without a strong message from the king, no Jew would ever be safe in the kingdom. It was her way of saying that the thirteenth of Adar was now over, but the danger to the Jews was not. Her request that the Jews be able to defend themselves the following day meant that she was convinced that they would be attacked in the city as they were in the palace.

The king responded to her request as he had in the past. Notice what the author said.

*So the king commanded that this be done. An edict was issued in Susa, and they hanged the ten sons of Haman. Esther 9:14*

The author did not indicate whether the king thought it was a good or bad idea. He simply said the king issued the command.

It is doubtful if the king wrote the command himself. Mordecai prepared his edicts and dispatched them as he had done previously. The text simply says an edict was issued in the city of Susa. In all probability, it was written by Mordecai and given personally to the Jews as well as being published through government channels.

Having been warned by the revised edict from Mordecai, the Jews responded.

*The Jews in Susa came together on the fourteenth day of the month of Adar, and they put to death in Susa three hundred men, but they did not lay their hands on the plunder. Esther 9:15*

They followed the same instructions they obeyed on the previous day - they gathered together for mutual self defense and support. They killed enemies of the Jews who attacked them.

You will note that there were at least 300 men in the city who hatred the Jews and tried to carry out Haman's edict. Granted, Susa was a large city, but there were at least 810 enemies of the Jews between the palace and the city who tried to carry out Haman's edict to exterminate the Jews. That is a lot of hatred and opposition.

Again, in the closing sentence of this verse, the author drew a sharp contrast between the Jews and their enemies. It has to do with the issue of plunder. Haman used plunder to appeal to people to get them to kill the Jews. The Jews defended themselves and refused to touch the possessions of the men they killed, though the edict, written by Mordecai, clearly allowed them to do so. It portrays the Jews' motives as being superior to those of their en-

emies. The statement in 9:10 and 9:15 are precisely the same. The repetition and the dramatic way in which it was written add tremendous emphasis to the message.

Meanwhile, the spotlight shifts from Susa the capital, to the 127 provinces of the kingdom.

*Meanwhile, the remainder of the Jews who were in the king's provinces also assembled to protect themselves and get relief from their enemies. They killed seventy-five thousand of them but did not lay their hands on the plunder. Esther 9:16*

You will observe that in each instance the author recorded that the Jews had done exactly as Mordecai instructed them in his edict. In all 127 provinces, the Jews gathered together on the thirteenth of Adar. The author did not make it clear whether all the Jews in a given province came together or if it was all the Jews in a given city. It simply says they came together “to protect themselves and get relief from their enemies.” This gives us an insight into their thinking. Having received the warning of their pending annihilation, they were not satisfied to just survive. They had permission to destroy their enemies. They dared to believe that though they were probably outnumbered and certainly their enemies were better armed, still they could and would destroy their enemies. What confidence they had!

The closing phrase of the sentence gives us a glimpse of their motivation. First, they were slaves, but other groups around them were also slaves. The Hebrew text says, “...and a **rest** from their enemies.” The word “rest” is “nuwach” (נָוַחַ) and means “to settle down,” “to stay in one place because it was peaceful,” “to give comfort.” The meaning of this word tells us a lot. This was not a new problem for these Jewish people. They had been living in pain and turmoil at the hands of their enemies ever since they came to Persia. They assembled to once and for all escape the abuse of these enemies. They lived in the land, but they had not settled down; they had no peace or respite from abuse. Until now, they suffered at the hands of their enemies and they saw no hope of a change in this dire situation. This day would change everything for them.

The closing sentence of verse 16 is a very brief report of the events of 13th. Adar. There are two very important pieces of information in the report:

- **“They killed seventy five thousand of them...”** The text is not too specific, but we assume that the 75,000 was a cumulative total for all 127 provinces. That is a lot of known enemies. This would be an average of more than 590 enemies per province. There is no mention if any of these were military or militia personnel. It appears doubtful if any concerted effort was made by either contingent. We can not be certain of this.
- **“...But did not lay their hands on the plunder.”** This is an exact restatement of the author’s words in Esther 9:10. Such repetition is almost always for purposes of emphasis. Add to this the very emphatic way in which it was worded. It, then, becomes an unforgettable report, which is exactly what the author intended.

This emphasis underscores the contrast previously drawn - the enemies were encouraged to participate in the annihilation by the promise of booty. On the other hand, the Jews killed their enemies, but did not so much as lay a hand on the property of their dead enemies.

**Esther 9:17-19 - The Jews Declared a Feast and Celebration**

There is a cause-effect relationship between 9:11-16 and 9:17-19. The author used 9:17 as a summary of this relationship.

*This happened on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar, and on the fourteenth they rested and made it a day of feasting and joy. Esther 9:17*

In this verse, the author was still describing the events as they occurred in the provinces. His summary was composed of two separate statements:

- **“This (killing 75,000 enemies) happened on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar.”** This clearly described the events in unwalled villages across the provinces.
- **“On the fourteenth they rested and made it a day of feasting and joy.”** The celebration was more than a time of great feasting. It was a time to rejoice that God had delivered them from their enemies. Notice, it was not a celebration of the destruction of their enemies, but of their own deliverance. Pagan peoples did not consider life sacred. They could enjoy killing their enemies. The people of God were to be different. They were to celebrate that God had delivered them. It was not to get excited because they had killed so many of their enemies.

It was also a remembrance. This is how they retained an awareness of the joys and sorrows of their history. Feasting is an almost universal expression of celebration and remembrance. The American “thanksgiving day” is the same sort of thing.

The author quickly moved to clarify what appeared to be contradictory statements.

*The Jews in Susa, however, had assembled on the thirteenth and fourteenth, and then on the fifteenth they rested and made it a day of feasting and joy. That is why rural Jews -- those living in villages -- observe the fourteenth of the month of Adar as a day of joy and feasting, a day for giving presents to each other. Esther 9:18-19*

Having just described what happened throughout the empire, the author described what happened in the same process in Susa. It was different. Apparently there was much greater opposition in the capital city than in much of the rest of the empire.

Verse 18 briefly described the process followed in the capital:

- The Jewish people gathered to defend themselves and kill their enemies on the thirteenth and fourteenth of Adar.
- They gathered for a day of feasting and joy on the fifteenth of Adar.

Verse 19, however, briefly described the process followed in the villages and the rest of the empire:

- They gathered to defend themselves on the thirteenth of Adar, as Mordecai instructed them.
- They gathered on the fourteenth of Adar to rejoice, feast and share presents.

Though the text is silent on the issue, it appears that the reason for the different timing of the celebration was the fact that the enemies of the Jews, in Susa, were more determined to kill the Jewish people than those who lived in the other provinces. The Jews needed a second day to defend themselves against the attacks of their enemies.

### **Esther 9:20-25 - Mordecai Commanded Purim to be Celebrated**

Though the scene does not change, the emphasis does. Look at the way the author dealt with it.

*Mordecai recorded these events, and he sent letters to all the Jews throughout the provinces of King Xerxes, near and far, Esther 9:20*

In this paragraph, Mordecai served in two different capacities. He began by recording the events of the thirteenth to the fifteenth of Adar. As we indicated earlier, the keeping of the history of the empire was a job overseen by the viceroy, the second in command of the empire. Because the empire was so vast, specific events would receive only general coverage. That is precisely what happened with these events.

This verse also tells us that Mordecai wrote letters to all the Jews of the empire giving them specific spiritual instructions. This was not the task of the viceroy and Mordecai was not serving in that capacity as he wrote them. The instructions recorded in verse 21 were the responsibility of the chief rabbi or head of the Sanhedrin. If this is true, and I believe it is, then it suggests that Mordecai was probably a leading rabbi prior to his captivity. In the captivity, he continued to serve in that honored capacity though he had been elevated to the position of viceroy of the empire.

This also tells us something about Xerxes, the king. He had to love his wife a great deal and trust her cousin, Mordecai, greatly in order to place one of the Jewish religious leaders in the position, second only to himself.

Notice the instructions Mordecai gave the Jews in his letter to them.

*to have them celebrate annually the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar Esther 9:21*

He was not asking them to celebrate Purim on the occasion of this great deliverance. He was rather telling the Jewish people to celebrate Purim as a religious holiday each year forever. Only such instructions from the head of their Sanhedrin would be observed by the Jewish people. This causes one to believe that Mordecai was, in fact, the head of the Sanhedrin, or a body like it, or else the leading Jewish rabbi of that day. If this is true, and I believe it is, then it puts the atrocities planned by Haman in a completely different light. Haman would not be just hanging an obstinate Jew, he would be killing one of the spiritual leaders of God's people, Israel.

The author continued to describe Mordecai's instructions.

*as the time when the Jews got relief from their enemies, and as the month when their sorrow was turned into joy and their mourning into a day of celebration. He wrote them to observe the days as days of feasting and joy and giving presents of food to one another and gifts to the poor. Esther 9:22*

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When you read this verse, you notice that Mordecai identified these two days in two specific ways:

1. **“The time when the Jews got relief from their enemies.”** In their history, the Jewish people had had several enemies. One wonders why Mordecai was not more specific. There are a couple of possibilities:
  - a. Though he probably wrote as a Rabbi, he was still the Viceroy of the Medo-Persian empire. Any way that he might identify these enemies would be considered an offense to the survivors of that nation or nations. To speak simply of “their enemies” removed that potential problem.
  - b. Mordecai wrote to specific Jewish people who had just gone through the experience of escaping annihilation at the hands of these “enemies.” No one in the Jewish community would have difficulty understanding the identity of this “enemy.”
2. **“The month when their sorrow was turned to joy and their mourning into a day of celebration.”** This may escape our sensibilities, but not theirs. One might wonder why Mordecai would need to explain the nature of this celebration. Mordecai was very specific - “It is the time their sorrow was turned to joy.” It was not a celebration of the destruction of their enemies, but rejoicing in their survival. This sets Israel apart from their pagan neighbors. The pagans would celebrate the destruction of their enemies. This also celebrated the success of their gods in destroying the people who served other gods.

Mordecai also gave them instructions for the observance itself.

These two days were days of feasting and joy. This meant that they were to do three things:

- a. **These were two days of feasting and special meals.** The word “feasting” is “mishteh” (מִשְׁתֶּה) and means “to imbibe,” “to drink.” It was a way to describe a banquet as opposed to a meal. It is exactly the same word Esther used when she invited Xerxes and Haman to a wine feast in her residence. We must remember that the Jews to whom Mordecai wrote were slaves and their possessions were slight to say the least. A wine feast was a great occasion for them.

These were two days of “joy.” The word “joy” is “samach” (שָׂמַח) and means “to brighten up,” “to rejoice,” “to cheer up,” “to make merry.” This would be in stark contrast to the grueling slave labor to which they were otherwise subjected.
- b. **They were to give presents to one another.** The Hebrew text reads, “sending portions, a man to his neighbor.” The word “portions/presents” is “menath” (מְנַת) and means “portion,” “or” “allotment.” Everything, including food, was in short supply for the Jews. A “portion” was the amount of food a person would usually eat in a day. It was a way of suggesting a time of generosity and hopefulness.
- c. **They were to give “gifts to the poor.”** One of the ingredients of the Passover celebration was that the people should give gifts to the poor. In this instruction, Mordecai was identifying Purim with Passover in that both were celebrations of survival - one from Egypt, the other in Medo-Persia.

A problem surfaces. These gifts were to be given to the poor. Who were the poor when the entire Jewish community was enslaved? Contrary to what some might believe, all slaves were not equally impoverished. In our study we have talked about Mordecai, who wore a golden crown and purple robes of the most expensive sort. Technically, however, Mordecai was a slave. In this study we have also discussed Jewish slaves who were in the unwalled cities of provinces far from Susa. Some of the Jewish slaves would be widows or orphans who would receive little provision from their owners. These people would be fortunate to have clothing to wear much less purple robes. It was to these impoverished among the slaves that the gifts were to be given. The giving of gifts to the poor insured that even the most destitute could feast and celebrate this great deliverance.

The Jews understood exactly what Mordecai was instructing them to do.

*So the Jews agreed to continue the celebration they had begun, doing what Mordecai had written to them. Esther 9:23*

Again, their agreement to continue this celebration without end tells us that the people of that day saw Mordecai as the Jewish spiritual leader as well as the viceroy of Medo-Persia. It also suggests that succeeding generations of devout Jews, down to our own time, affirm that Mordecai was one of their spiritual mentors to whom they should give careful heed.

The author turns to explain the reason Mordecai instructed Israel to observe Purim.

*For Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had plotted against the Jews to destroy them and had cast the pur (that is, the lot) for their ruin and destruction. Esther 9:24*

The verse begins with the word “for.” This indicates that an explanation is coming. The author again identified Haman’s background. He has done this several times in the book of Esther. This means that the author used it to emphasize just how much Haman hated the Jews and explains why he would try to use extreme means to bring havoc upon these people. Notice the way the author described Haman:

1. **Son of Hammedatha, the Agagite** - The word “Agagite” was another identification for Amalekites. The extreme hatred of Amalekites for Jews was legendary.
2. **The enemy of the Jews** - This is as much an accusation as it was an identifier. The author used it repeatedly to describe just how hostile Haman was to the Jewish people. The word “enemy” is “tsarar” (צָרַר) and literally means “an adversary,” “to afflict,” “to distress,” “to cramp a person or put them in a straight.” You will notice that for a reason the author does not explain, in a book written in Hebrew, he explained or translated a Hebrew word. The text says, “and had cast the pur (that is the lot).” “Pur” (פּוּר) is a Hebrew word which means “broken pieces.” The word “lot,” on the other hand, is “goral” (גּוֹרָל) and literally means “to be rough like a stone,” “a pebble,” “small stones used to cast lots.”

The author rehearses the reason for the celebration as a report of Haman’s activities:

*But when the plot came to the king's attention, he issued written orders that the evil scheme Haman had devised against the Jews should come back onto his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows. Esther 9:25*



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1. He plotted to destroy the Jews.
2. He cast the Pur (lot) to determine the time to bring about the ruin and destruction of the Jews.
3. The plot came to the king's attention.
4. The king gave orders that Haman's evil plans should come back upon himself.
5. The king also commanded that the sons of Haman should be hanged on the gallows. This accomplished two things:
  - a. It subjected Haman and his sons to public shame and humiliation.
  - b. Because the sons of Haman were hanged, the name of Haman would die out. This was the greatest shame that could be visited upon any man.

### Esther 9:26-28 - An Explanation of Purim

This paragraph begins with a parenthetical statement.

*(Therefore these days were called Purim, from the word pur.) Because of everything written in this letter and because of what they had seen and what had happened to them, Esther 9:26*

The question might be asked, if the word for "lot" is "Pur," why do they call the holiday "Purim?" The "im" ending indicates that the word is plural. You will remember that Haman had to cast the lot each day for nearly a year. It is this fact that seemed so marvelous to the Jews. If it had not held up Haman's action against the Jews until Mordecai had the opportunity to save the king's life and Esther had ingratiated herself to the king, the Jews would all be dead.

The author prefaced his statement by giving two reasons for what the Jewish people in Medo-Persia did:

1. **Because of everything written in this letter** - The content referred to as "this letter" began in 9:20. Mordecai commanded the Jews to celebrate the Purim. He had encouraged them and instructed them to defend themselves. They did it. They were alive and thousands of their enemies were dead.
2. **Because of what they had seen and what had happened to them.** - They had seen the impossible. Their most hated enemy was hanged and a Jewish leader was placed in his governmental position. They had seen their lives spared when the plan was firmly in place to annihilate them.

They were prepared to die, but Mordecai wrote a new law enabling them to assemble, defend themselves and plunder their long time enemies. Though greatly outnumbered and armed with only the most primitive weapons, they killed nearly 76,000 of their enemies.

The author continued his explanation:

*the Jews took it upon themselves to establish the custom that they and their descendants and all who join them should without fail observe these two days every year, in the way prescribed and at the time appointed. Esther 9:27*

Though Mordecai had instructed them to observe Purim, the author stressed the fact that it finally happened, not because of Mordecai or Esther, but because the people took it upon themselves to do three things:

1. To establish the custom of observing Purim as a celebration of the mercy of God.
2. They established this custom in such a way that each succeeding generation would observe it as well.
3. They made it mandatory that Gentiles who became Jews must also participate in this celebration of the mercy of God.

At the end of verse 27, a very natural concern was voiced. Down through history many marvelous institutions have been initiated. Succeeding generations have found these less and less significant as time passed. The statement, “in the way practiced and at the time appointed” were directed at this fear. The Jewish people took it upon themselves to observe this festival with great care so that the initial observance would be maintained in spirit in every minute detail, forever.

The text continued with this careful description of Purim.

*These days should be remembered and observed in every generation by every family, and in every province and in every city. And these days of Purim should never cease to be celebrated by the Jews, nor should the memory of them die out among their descendants. Esther 9:28*

There is great emphasis here. Observe that there are two sentences in this verse. The first sentence required that the feast of Purim be **remembered** and **observed** in every generation, by every family and in every province and city. The word “remembered” is “zakar” (זָכַר) and means “to mark so as to be recognized,” “to remember,” “to recount as the Jews recount the events of the Exodus at Passover.”

The word “observed” is “asah” (עָשָׂה) and means “to do,” “to make,” “to carry out the observance.”

The second sentence makes a similar requirement in different words. Parallels written for purposes of emphasis, like these two sentences, have a similar message, but the repetition is seldom word for word. This second sentence states the same requirement, but in negative form. “Should never cease to be celebrated” carries the same idea, but in negative form, as that of the first sentence, “should be remembered and observed in every generation.” Again, it is a way to place strong emphasis on the main idea - this must always be a celebration of the mercy of God among these Jews and their descendants forever.

#### **Esther 9:29-32 - Esther Wrote Purim Letter to Jews**

The central focus again shifts back to the palace.

*So Queen Esther, daughter of Abihail, along with Mordecai the Jew, wrote with full authority to confirm this second letter concerning Purim. Esther 9:29*

The writing and sending of a letter was a huge task and never taken casually. One must wonder, why do Esther and Mordecai need to write a letter together? Why didn't Xerxes write it? Why was a second letter necessary? Xerxes was not a Jew. It would have been

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inappropriate for him to write the letter on this subject. Both Esther and Mordecai were Jews and both held great prestige in the Jewish community. It would be appropriate, even necessary for them to write a letter representing the king at this juncture affirming the celebration of this new feast.

Observe the way the author identified Esther - "Queen Esther, daughter of Abihail..." Esther had a double identity. She was the queen of Medo-Persia. At the same time, the credential of "daughter of Abihail" identified her as a Jew. The name "Abihail" is Jewish. A Jewish woman was usually identified as the daughter of her father or the wife of her husband. This was a bit surprising for the queen of Medo-Persia to be a Jewish lady. This may account for the double identification.

Observe, also, the way the author again identified Mordecai - "Mordecai the Jew." This is a repetition for purposes of emphasis. The importance of this emphasis was that he was the viceroy of Medo-Persia and he was a Jew. This would be an astonishing discovery for most everyone.

The author reported that both Esther and Mordecai "wrote with full authority." The word "authority" is "tokef." It describes a king's position. By defeating his adversaries, he earned the power to "overpower," or "to be the mighty one," "to have total authority." In a kingdom, this situation belonged only to the king. It is reasonable to assume that the author said that Esther and Mordecai, who did not have power to rule, were granted this authority by the king for this occasion. They exhibited power and authority on behalf of the king. The authority enabled them to confirm the celebration of Purim. Slave owners and lower level governmental officials might want their Jewish slaves to work on the fourteenth and fifteenth of Adar, but on behalf of the king, Esther and Mordecai proclaimed these days religious holidays and no one could change that decision.

Mordecai was excellent at following through on his work. Notice what he did.

*And Mordecai sent letters to all the Jews in the 127 provinces of the kingdom of Xerxes -- words of goodwill and assurance Esther 9:30*

Mordecai sent these confirming letters to the Jews in all 127 provinces of the empire. The author identified the content of these letters - "words of good will and assurance." These words were carefully chosen:

1. **"Good will"** - In the Hebrew text, "good will" is translated from the word "peace" "shalom," (שָׁלוֹם). This was quite appropriate. These people had known threatening danger ever since they were taken captive and brought to Medo-Persia.
2. **"Assurance"** - In the Hebrew, the word for "assurance" is "emeth" (אֱמֶת) and means "truth," "trustworthiness," and comes from the root which means "to build up," "to foster as a nurse or parent." Until now, they knew they could trust no one. Everyone took advantage of them and tried to kill them. Mordecai, a Jew, a man who had proven his trustworthiness, wrote to them in words that would encourage and comfort them. They desperately needed this concern.

The question surfaces, why was the queen, Esther, involved in this decree? Queens were never involved in the work of running government. We must remember that Esther was a Jew and would thus have entree with the Jewish population. Xerxes, on the other hand,

was not a Jew and would have no impact upon the spiritual inclinations of the Jews at all. Though the text does not say, it was apparently wise on Xerxes' part to invest Esther with the authority to write this edict in order to establish it among the Jews as a lasting celebration of their faith in God. The author continued his explanation.

*to establish these days of Purim at their designated times, as Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther had decreed for them, and as they had established for themselves and their descendants in regard to their times of fasting and lamentation. Esther 9:31*

There was also an official purpose for this letter. The author described it - "to establish these days of Purim at their designated times..." The word "establish" is "koom" (קִוִּי) and means "to rise," "to raise up," "to establish." This festival never existed before. Now, Esther and Mordecai are establishing a religious festival to be observed by all the Jews forever. Observe that the author stressed the timing of the feast. They did for this feast as it had been done for their other religious feasts. They did not just pick a day. The actual days of the encounter and deliverance were to be observed. The timing of the feast were seemingly as important as the feast itself.

Notice how carefully the author listed the protocol for this observance.

1. "As Mordecai the Jew and Esther the queen had decreed for them." It appears that though both Mordecai and Esther wrote. Still only one communication was sent. It appears that Mordecai wrote representing both the king and the Jewish religious establishment. Esther apparently wrote representing the king.
2. "As they had established for themselves and their descendants." It is a way of underscoring the fact that this was not forced on the Jewish people by civil or religious leaders. It was an idea which gathered the support of civil religious leaders and the rank and file people as well. This is a groundswell of gratitude and with good reason.

The author stated again, the anguish out of which the rejoicing came. He referred to this when he said, "in regard to their times of fasting and lamentation." The word for "fasting" is "tsoom" (צֹוֹם) and literally means "to cover the mouth: or "to fast." It was a reminder that in their dire straits, they fasted for three days and prayed.

The word for "lamentation" is "zehawkaw" (זְהַוְּקָו) and means "to shriek," "to cry as they did in mourning the dead." We must always remember that the Jewish people cherished their tears, both tears of joy and tears of sorrow.

Having described the message of Mordecai, the author then turned his attention to the message Esther sent to all the Jewish people of the empire.

*Esther's decree confirmed these regulations about Purim, and it was written down in the records. Esther 9:32*

In one brief sentence, the author recorded the message she sent to the Jewish people. The word "confirm" is exactly the same word translated "established" in 9:31.

It may seem like overkill for the viceroy of the empire, the head religious leader of the Jews and the queen of the realm to each confirm the regulations for this new festival. Two factors, at least, are involved in this effort.

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1. This is a brand new celebration and the Jews did not take to innovation in their appointed feasts with ease.
2. These people had lived their entire captivity at the mercy of more enemies than friends. We must not forget that they had killed at least 75,510 “enemies” as a result of the attempt to exterminate all the Jews. Under this level of threat and fear, these people needed all the encouragement and assurance they could find.

### **Conclusion**

It is particularly significant that we again ask ourselves what we can see of the hand of God in the lives of the people of Israel and the people of Medo-Persia.

1. Evil forces were surprised that the people of God overpowered them.
2. It is not accidental that Mordecai rose to power in a nation that totally despised his native people; where the person who held the second most powerful position tried to kill him.
3. Only God could enable Jews to kill 75,000 enemies when they had the poorest of weapons.
4. Only God could create a situation where the governmental officials would be afraid of a small national group of slaves or a high governmental official who was one of them.
5. God gave Esther favor in the sight of the king to hang Haman's sons on the gallows Haman erected to hang Mordecai.
6. Only God could move Xerxes to invite Esther to name her further desire with the promise it would be accomplished without knowing what the request might be.
7. Only God could cause Xerxes to be willing to hang the ten sons of Haman.
8. The Jews in Susa, greatly outnumbered, were able to kill 500 “enemies” and apparently suffered no casualties themselves.
9. The Jews responded positively to the instruction to celebrate a new, two-day religious holiday.



## QUESTIONS FOR ESTHER LESSON 10

### ESTHER 10:1 - 3

#### XERXES HONORED MORDECAI

1. In Esther chapter 10 there is only one paragraph. On the following table write a summary of seven words or less for this paragraph.

10:1-3	
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2. Read 10:1 very carefully.
  - a. Why would the author use the word "tribute" when speaking of citizens of the kingdom?
  - b. The author also spoke of "distant shores." What shores might he be talking about?
3. In 10:2, the author spoke of the rising power of Mordecai.
  - a. The author does not describe what "his (Mordecai) acts of power and might," could include. In view of what we have seen, what might be included in this general reference?
  - b. The author mentioned that the acts of Mordecai were written in the book of "the annals of the kings of Media and Persia." What problem, if any, can you see with this statement?
4. In 10:3, the author continued with his description of the reputation of Mordecai.
  - a. How does the author describe Mordecai's position?
  - b. What reasons does he offer for this situation?
  - c. What does this tell you about Mordecai?
5. Review your study of this brief closing chapter of the book of Esther. Though God is not named in the chapter, record the places where you see the hand of God at work in the lives of these beleaguered people.





## LESSON 10: – ESTHER 10:1 – 3

### XERXES HONORED MORDECAI

This is a most unusual situation. This chapter contains only one paragraph of three verses. Therefore, the titles of the paragraph and the chapter must be exactly the same

#### Esther 10:1-3 - Xerxes Honored Mordecai

There is a total shift in the focus of the writing. Chapter nine ends with a description of the establishment of Purim. Chapter ten, however, begins with an imposed tribute.

*King Xerxes imposed tribute throughout the empire, to its distant shores. Esther 10:1*

At best, this chapter seems disjointed from chapter nine. It, also, seems disjointed within itself.

1. Verse one deals with the imposition of tribute.
2. Verse two is a summary statement of the greatness of Mordecai.
3. Verse three deals with Mordecai's relationship with the Jews and the reasons for it.

Observe that Xerxes imposed a “tribute” upon the empire, not a “tax.” The word for tribute is “mas” (מַס) and means “a tax,” “forced labor,” “heavy tribute placed upon conquered people.”

The word for “tax,” however, is “nagas” (נָגַס) and means “to tax,” “to harass,” “to tyrannize.” A tax can be imposed on a citizen or foreigner. A tribute, however, was reserved for conquered people. In the text, a tribute was imposed upon the entire empire to its distant shores. The author did not attempt to explain why the king treated the entire kingdom as though they were conquered territories.

One might assume that this was Xerxes' response to their participation in the attempted destruction of the people of Israel. The text neither confirms nor denies this possible scenario.

It is entirely possible that the imposition of this “tribute,” not “tax,” was imposed as Xerxes' reaction to the attempt to kill the Jews in all 127 provinces. It is also possible that this reaction found its origin in Mordecai, as he was the primary consultant at this time.

Our translation reads, “to its distant shores,” while the Hebrew text reads, “the land of the islands.” The Midrash, the Jewish commentary on the Scriptures written prior to 1200 AD, suggests that there were 100 regular provinces and 27 island provinces in the Medo-Persian empire.

In verse two, the focus turns to the recorded deeds of Mordecai.

*And all his acts of power and might, together with a full account of the greatness of Mordecai to which the king had raised him, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Media and Persia? Esther 10:2*

There is an interesting piece of information in this verse. Notice that the verse includes substantial information about Mordecai.

1. “All his acts of power and might.”
2. “A **full account** of the greatness of Mordecai to which the king had raised him.”

The addition of the words “a full account” to the report of Mordecai suggests that this record includes fuller detail than that concerning the king. This was unheard of. This record, maintained under the guidance of the viceroy, was intended to present the reign of the king in the best possible light. Nevertheless, the account of Mordecai was apparently given in great detail in the report of the king. The author indicated that this information was reported in “the annals of the kings of Media and Persia.” This is the general history of the nation, kept by the viceroy, which maintained general records of events in the kingdom. This was a startling announcement to say the least.

The author finally gave a detailed description of the accomplishments of Mordecai.

*Mordecai the Jew was second in rank to King Xerxes, preeminent among the Jews, and held in high esteem by his many fellow Jews, because he worked for the good of his people and spoke up for the welfare of all the Jews. Esther 10:3*

Look at the way the author described the accomplishments of Mordecai:

1. He was second in command of the empire under Xerxes.
2. He was “preeminent.” The word is “gadowl” (גָּדוֹל) and means “to be great,” “to be elder,” among the Jews. There was no other Jew with greater honor or position than Mordecai.
3. He was held in high esteem by his fellow Jews. The previous statement refers to his position. This statement refers to his relationship to the other Jews.
4. He worked for the good of the people. This may not seem like much. This was most unusual, to say the least.
5. He spoke up for the welfare of the Jews.

Mordecai ruled the empire well, but he did not do it at the expense of his people. This was something that would have shocked most anyone in government at that time.

## Conclusion

Though this chapter is exceedingly short, there are some indications here that God is at work in the chapter.

1. It takes the power of God to take a Jewish religious leader and make him the viceroy of the greatest empire in the world.
2. Medo-Persian rulers had a natural dislike for Jews at any level. In spite of this almost universal hatred, Xerxes raised Mordecai to a position of power even though other Medo-Persian officials would never understand.

## XERXES HONORED MORDECAI

3. Religious leaders, in captivity, were not usually held in high esteem even by Jews. Nevertheless, Mordecai held a higher position than any Jew. He was more highly respected among his people than anyone else.
4. In a land of their captivity, the Jews found a viceroy who ruled well, but did not do so at their expense. This was an act of God.



## ESTHER: THE CONCLUSION

You may remember that at the beginning of the study we did an overview of the book of Esther. We recorded the following table on that occasion.

Chapter 1	Vashti Refused the King's Command
Chapter 2	Esther Became Queen
Chapter 3	Haman Plots to Kill Jews
Chapter 4	Esther Agreed to Go to the King
Chapter 5	Esther Risked Everything to Take Her Stand
Chapter 6	Mordecai Finally Honored
Chapter 7	Haman Hanged on His Own Gallows
Chapter 8	Mordecai Given Honor and Power
Chapter 9	Haman's Sons Hanged on His Gallows
Chapter 10	Xerxes Honored Mordecai

Now we need to study this table to see what it will tell us about the book itself. Our observations should help us understand the direction of the book:

1. Though this report took place in Medo-Persia, the story does not focus upon the king of that country.
2. Though the book bears the name of Esther, she is the focus of attention in only two of the ten chapters.
3. Again, though the book bears the name of Esther, the climax of the book focuses on Mordecai. Esther is not even mentioned in the final chapter of the book. One must question whether or not this is a book about Esther, though her story is included and highlighted.
4. Though the name of God does not appear, as such, in the book, it appears to this author there is a long list of things that God does in this beautiful story.

For purposes of review, let us look again at some of the most prominent pieces of information we discovered about God in the story.

OBSERVATIONS FROM ESTHER	DIVINE CHARACTER
When Queen Vashti was removed, it opened up the way for God to honor Esther for her faithfulness. Chapter 1.	Powerful
God placed Esther in a position where she could appeal to the king and become the queen of Medo-Persia.	Control
God placed Mordecai in a position where He could use the viceroy's faithfulness. (ch. 2)	Control

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OBSERVATIONS FROM ESTHER	DIVINE CHARACTER
God placed Esther in a position where she could become queen and help save her people. (2)	Control
God allowed Haman to manipulate the king (3)	Control
God allowed Haman to rise to power where he would destroy himself. (3)	Control
God allowed Mordecai's inner strength to confront Haman. (3)	Guide
God frustrated Haman's attempt to use Pur to gain an auspicious time to approach the king against Mordecai. (3)	Control
God allowed Haman to issue the horrible edict to exterminate the Jews. (3)	Control
God allowed Haman to see himself as the victor and celebrate. (3)	Powerful
God strengthened Mordecai to take an unpopular stand. (4)	Powerful
God strengthened Hathach to carry messages between Esther and Mordecai at personal risk. (4)	Powerful
God enabled Mordecai to discover the plot to kill Xerxes. (4)	Guide
God strengthened Esther to go to the king at the risk of her life. (4)	Powerful
God heard the cry of His people in their agony and despair.	Mercy
God enabled Esther to obtain the king's favor when she violated his law. (5)	Guide
The king was patient when it seemed Esther was playing games. (5)	Control
God enabled Esther to postpone her request and ultimately saved the lives of the Jews. (5)	Guide
God allowed Haman's pride to allow him to feel secure and careless. (5)	Control
God allowed Xerxes' sleeplessness. As a result, he discovered the fact that Mordecai was never honored for saving the king. (6)	Guide, Control
God allowed Haman's pride to suggest ultimate honor for himself only to discover it was for Mordecai. (6)	Power
Strengthened Esther to have the courage to disclose the plot before Haman rather than behind his back. (7)	Powerful
Allowed Haman's attempt to plead with Esther to be misunderstood as an attempt to take advantage of her. (7)	Control
Allowed Haman to be hanged on the gallows he erected to hang Mordecai, the man of God. (7)	Justice, mercy
Only God could bring Mordecai to be viceroy of the empire that hated Jews. (8)	Guide
Only God could bring all Haman's wealth to Queen Esther when she was a Jew. (8)	Justice
Only God could enable the minority Jews to overpower their well armed enemies. (9)	Power, mercy

## THE CONCLUSION

OBSERVATIONS FROM ESTHER	DIVINE CHARACTER
Only God enabled the nationals to be afraid of the Jews. This ultimately helped to keep them alive. (9)	Control
God enabled the king to give Esther favor to extend the time for Jewish defense and hang the ten sons of Haman when so many had already been killed in the empire. (9)	Mercy, justice
Only God could move the Jews to observe the holiday which celebrates the mercy and power of God. (9)	Guide
Only God could motivate Xerxes to make a viceroy of a Jewish religious leader. (9)	Guide

( ) - Indicates the chapter in which the information was found.

As you study this table, you will notice that it focuses on five qualities of the character of God.

1. **Omnipotence** - the power of God to intervene in the lives of people to accomplish His will. Two quotations from the book come immediately to mind:

*His advisers and his wife Zeresh said to him, "Since Mordecai, before whom your downfall has started, is of Jewish origin, you cannot stand against him -- you will surely come to ruin!" Esther 6:13*

Mordecai said to Esther,

*"Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, **relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place**, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?" Esther 4:13-14*

God is so great that no human design, no matter how brilliant or powerful, can stand before Him or hinder His purpose. All will of necessity come to ruin.

2. **Guide** - God indirectly guided the affairs of people in such a way that their expression of their own choices accomplished His will to show mercy to the righteous and allow the unrighteous to punish themselves.
3. **Control** - God causes people to work in such a way that His designs for His people are accomplished.
4. **Mercy** - God hears the cry of His people and will do whatever is necessary to meet their needs.
5. **Justice** - In the eyes of God, justice must ultimately triumph. God will do whatever is necessary to bring justice to bear and defend the helpless.

God is so great that He can control the plans of evil men so that as they carry out their plans, they do not destroy the oppressed, whom God lives and protects.

If you reflect upon the previous table, you will note the emphasis the author placed upon these attributes.

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CONTROL - 12
POWERFUL - 8
GUIDE - 8
MERCY - 4
JUSTICE - 3

The book of Esther highlights a few contrasts which we have identified as we studied:

THE GOOD	THE BAD
ESTHER	VASHTI
MORDECAI	HAMAN
THE JEWS	THEIR ENEMIES

As you can see, in the course of the story, the good and the righteous triumph; the evil may appear to prevail, but ultimately they are destroyed. Those who focused their energies on evil were subjected to the evils they designed for others. This points to another of the qualities of the divine character - His purity and holiness.

If you look at the lives of those who are the central focus of this book, you will see just how this works out.

MORDECAI	HAMAN
LOYAL - 2:22	VAIN - 3:5
PRINCIPLED - 3:2	VICIOUS - 3:6
COMPASSIONATE - 2:7	DECEPTIVE - 3:8
COURAGEOUS - 2:22; 4:1	LIAR - 3:8
HONEST - 2:23	BRIBER - 3:9
STUBBORN - 3:4	VIOLENTLY DETERMINED - 3:14
DETERMINED - 4:4	VILE CUNNING - 3:13
WELL INFORMED - 4:7	WINNING - 3:1
THOROUGH - 4:8	PROUD - 3:2;3:5; 3:15; 5:11; 5:12;
GREAT FAITH - 4:14	SHREWD - 3:6
PATIENCE - 6:2	DECEPTIVE - 3:8
HUMBLE - 6:12	MANIPULATIVE - 3:9
BRILLIANT - 8:9	BRUTAL - 3:13
CARRIED POWER WELL - 9:4	ARROGANT - 5:12
SPIRITUAL LEADER - 9:19	POUTING - 5:13
LOYAL TO HIS PEOPLE - 9:31	SUBVERSIVE - 6:3
FAITHFUL - 10:2	SELF BLINDING - 6:6
	TERRIFIED - 7:6
	COWARD - 7:8



## THE CONCLUSION

The contrast between the two men is sharp. Notice, also, that Haman ended up being hanged on gallows he erected to kill Mordecai. Mordecai, on the other hand, was elevated to the position Haman craved. This Jewish viceroy gained a higher and higher reputation.

You will notice that the same situation exists between Esther and Vashti.

ESTHER	VASHTI
WINNING PERSONALITY - 2:9	SENSE OF MODESTY - 1:12
OBEDIENT - 2:10; 2:20	REBELLIOUS - 1:9
CONFIDENT - 2:15	DISOBEDIENT - 1:12
WINNING - 2:17	ACCUSED - BAD EXAMPLE - 1:17
COMPASSIONATE - 4:5; 8:6	ACCUSED - DISRESPECT - 1:20
DISCIPLINED/INFORMED - 4:11	BEAUTIFUL - 1:10
DEEP FAITH - 4:16	
COURAGEOUS - 4:16;7:3;7:6	
SACRIFICIAL - 4:16	
FAITHFUL - 5:1	
PATIENCE - 5:4; 8:5	
RESPECTFUL - 5:6;8:1	
GENEROUS - 5:8	
FIRM OF RESOLVE - 7:4	
DETERMINED - 8:3;8:8	
AGGRESSIVE - 8:5	
UNRELENTING - 9:13	

Again, the list is short for Vashti, but not at all complimentary. The list for Esther is long, but beautiful. Esther did not seek power or control, but desired first to please God. She came to the end of the story with power that other queens did not have the opportunity to use.

In the purposes of God, people are raised to positions of influence in order to accomplish the will of God. This, again, is a beautiful picture of the sovereignty of God in the affairs of nations. As we contemplate this sovereign power of God, we need to ask ourselves if we turn to God as sovereign when the problems of life seem greater than we can bear.

Though God is never mentioned in the book, it appears that the book is really a picture of the way in which God, in His holiness, moves in the lives of people to accomplish His will. There is a close parallel between this story and that which is told in the book of Genesis. One might use the words of Joseph as a fitting close to the study of the book of Esther.

*You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. "Genesis 50:20*

The book of Esther does not mention the name of God. Throughout the book, however, one can see the hand of God protecting, judging, directing, controlling the affairs of

## STANDING ALONE, BUT NEVER LONELY

people and nations. The God we see there is powerful and active, concerned and holy. He enables the weak to accomplish the impossible; the powerless to stand strong against tyranny in all its evil forms. Effortlessly, He causes the evil with power to destroy themselves. At the same time, His obedient servants are moved to positions of power without their own striving. It is in the effortlessness of His power that we sense the surpassing greatness of His sovereignty.

We, too, live in a world of indescribable political power. Nothing that we, as individuals, can do will have a deterring, changing effect upon the creeping evil that inevitably permeates irresistible power.

Quietly, unobtrusively, God is at work in the evil infested powers of our age. In the midst of these displays of evil and power, God seeks for one who will take his/her stand for right though his courage flies in the face of apparent wisdom and experience. God looks for one who is willing to risk all, not recklessly, but with that firm conviction that each of us has been strategically placed by God in a situation where His miraculous work through our feeble efforts shows the greatness of His sovereignty and brings glory to His name.